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ABSTRACT

COSMIC CONFLICT AS A HERMENEUTICAL FRAMEWORK  
FOR MISSION THEOLOGY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

by

Cristian Dumitrescu

Adviser: Bruce L. Bauer

ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Dissertation

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: COSMIC CONFLICT AS A HERMENEUTICAL FRAMEWORK FOR  
MISSION THEOLOGY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

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Date completed: July 2010

This research aims to rediscover mission as taught by the Old Testament and to show how that mission is consistent with God's loving and just character as reflected in the whole Bible. Toward this end, the research surveys assumptions that influence Old Testament mission theology and evaluates ways in which current theologies of mission and theological currents relate to the unity and continuity of the Bible. With this background, the study then proposes a comprehensive theological framework that preserves the unity of God's character and his mission.

Chapter 1 shows how the traditional understanding of centrifugal and centripetal mission is often based on uneven assumptions and indicates the need for a balanced approach to God's character and to his mission.

Chapter 2 reviews the main mission theology works of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries that deal primarily with the Old Testament. The chapter shows that the development of mission theology was influenced by an array of events and extra-biblical assumptions that affected God's mission by assigning a different type of mission to each Testament, thereby missing the unity of Scripture.

Chapter 3 analyzes the basic assumptions of theological currents such as dispensationalism and covenant theology and shows how belief in the superiority of the New Testament over the Old affects the understanding of mission in the Bible. The chapter also shows how the outward focus of ecumenical mission leads to a distortion of the biblical text.

Chapter 4 looks first at basic biblical assumptions that should inform the reading of the text and uses these assumptions in an attempt to discover a comprehensive framework for building a mission theology. The second part of the chapter proposes the cosmic conflict as an all-encompassing framework that preserves the unity and continuity of Scripture. It addresses main thematic concerns of previous mission theologies and restores mission's rightful motivation and purpose.

Chapter 5 concludes the study by summarizing correctives to the popular understanding of God and mission (*missio Dei*) in the Bible that come from recognition of the universal dimension of the cosmic conflict framework. This chapter also suggests some further missiological implications of that framework.

Andrews University  
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

COSMIC CONFLICT AS A HERMENEUTICAL FRAMEWORK  
FOR MISSION THEOLOGY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

A Dissertation  
Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy

by  
Cristian Dumitrescu

July 2010

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Background of the Problem**

For centuries the Bible has constituted for Christians the main source of inspiration and motivation for mission. People have looked for explicit passages that would tell them why and how to do mission. The most cited missionary passages are Matt 28:16-20, Acts 1:8, and Rom 10:11-13. All of these texts come from the New Testament.<sup>1</sup> For many modern readers of the Bible, the New Testament seems to answer most of their mission questions,<sup>2</sup> for these passages call for Christians to go and make disciples. Since centrifugal mission (going out to the nations) is explicitly seen in the New Testament, scholars have often preferred to base their theologies of mission on this part of Scripture, suggesting that the Old Testament does not offer clear support for the missionary activity.

In the last few decades, however, scholars have come to realize that mission did not begin with the New Testament, so they have begun to look to the Old Testament for

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<sup>1</sup> In the New Testament, almost all missionary commissioning (Matt 28:16-20; Mark 16:15, 16; Luke 24:43-49; Acts 1:8; etc.) alludes to the Old Testament. Actually, the only missionary-sending passages that do not use the Old Testament pattern are Matt 28:16-20 and Acts 1:8. All other similar passages (Mark 16:15, 16; Luke 24:43-49) are partial or complete citations of Old Testament passages from which the early church got its marching orders.

<sup>2</sup> H. H. Charles Scobie, "Israel and the Nations: An Essay in Biblical Theology," *Tyndale Bulletin* 43 (1992): 302. See also J. Herbert Kane, *The Christian World Mission: Today and Tomorrow* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1981), 15; Harold Lindsell, *Missionary Principles and Practice* (Westwood, NJ: Revell, 1955), 29, 33-34; M. Thomas Thangaraj, *The Common Task: A Theology of Christian Mission* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1999), 121.

the basis or foundation on which the New Testament view of mission was built. The New Testament seems to point back to the Old Testament by showing the promises that have been fulfilled and to demonstrate a logical continuity between the two Testaments. This view also indicates that the roots for centrifugal mission and for sending are to be found in the Old Testament. Jesus used Old Testament passages to point out his mission and to reaffirm the Old Testament's validity. The apostles also used Old Testament passages to justify their preaching to the Gentiles.<sup>3</sup>

As a result, Old Testament scholars have begun to examine the Hebrew writings, looking for the concepts found in the New Testament and trying to discover the missiological patterns of the Old Testament.<sup>4</sup> This approach, of starting from the New Testament and moving to the Old Testament, has led to questionable conclusions.<sup>5</sup> Few

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<sup>3</sup> Jesus used Isa 61:1 as his mission statement, a passage from the second half of the book that is generally accepted as being centrifugally oriented. In Acts 13:47 Paul and Barnabas quote Isa 49:6 in order to justify their preaching to the Gentiles. See also Isa 28:16 and Joel 2:32 quoted in Rom 10:11-13; Amos 9:11-12 quoted in Acts 15:16, for the same purpose. Interestingly enough, they did not use the Great Commission or other command of Jesus, but chose instead Old Testament references. This seems to indicate an implicit understanding of Old Testament Scriptures in regard to mission, held by their Jewish audience.

<sup>4</sup> The approach has been used by Harold Henry Rowley, *The Faith of Israel: Aspects of Old Testament Thought* (London: SCM, 1956); idem, *Men of God: Studies in Old Testament History and Prophecy* (London: Nelson, 1963). Rowley begins to rediscover the Old Testament as a missionary book. Responding to Karl Barth's questions regarding the nature and basis of the missionary enterprise, Rowley analyzes the election motif in the Old Testament, approaching it from a missionary perspective. His works, *The Biblical Doctrine of Election* (London: Lutterworth, 1950) and *The Missionary Message of the Old Testament* (London: Carey Kingsgate, 1955), constitute the basis for later developments in the area of mission theology.

<sup>5</sup> Rowley correctly posits that Israel's election had only one purpose: service. When service is withheld, election loses its meaning. Unfortunately, Rowley argues that any serious study of the Old Testament should begin with Moses, the time period before this first missionary not counting as part of Israel's history. The main election event is seen in Israel's liberation from the Egyptian bondage. The backward reading from the New Testament to the Old determines different authors to choose different points of departure when analyzing mission in the Old Testament.



scholars have seen mission as a major subject in the Old Testament.<sup>6</sup> Some, at best, described mission as being different in the two Testaments: the Old Testament portraying nations flowing from afar to the worshipping center at Jerusalem (centripetal mission), and the New reflecting a centrifugal mission of going out to the nations. This conclusion was reached by looking at missiologically explicit passages in both parts of Scripture.<sup>7</sup> However, that conclusion leaves certain books and passages of the Old Testament out of the picture,<sup>8</sup> and questions the unity of Scripture. That approach also leaves the Old Testament in an inferior position. Such an approach raises hermeneutical issues and reveals certain presuppositions that are not innate to the Scriptures.

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<sup>6</sup> See Antony F. Campbell, *The Study Companion to Old Testament Literature: An Approach to the Writings of Pre-exilic and Exilic Israel* (Wilmington: Glazier, 1989); Robert K. Johnston, Robert P. Meye, and Robert L. Hubbard, eds., *Studies in Old Testament Theology* (Dallas: Word, 1992); Harold Henry Rowley, *Men of God: Studies in Old Testament History and Prophecy*; Norman Henry Snaith, *The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament* (London: Epworth, 1944); W. C. van Wyk and Wouter Cornelus, eds., *Studies in Wisdom Literature*, Old Testament Studies (Potchefstroom: Pro Rege-Pers Beperk, 1976); Oscar Cullmann, *Salvation in History* (London: SCM, 1967); Walther Eichrodt, *Man in the Old Testament* (London: SCM, 1951); Walter C. Kaiser, *The Uses of the Old Testament in the New* (Chicago: Moody, 1985); idem, *Back Toward the Future: Hints for Interpreting Biblical Prophecy* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989); idem, *The Messiah in the Old Testament*, Studies in Old Testament Biblical Theology (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995); Lyman Rand Tucker, ed., *Toward Rediscovering the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1987).

<sup>7</sup> H. H. Charles Scobie expresses this understanding: “The eschatological expectation of the ingathering of the Gentiles was seen as involving the nations coming to Israel, not Israel going to the nations. Here [in the New Testament] the reversal is even more striking: the basically centripetal movement of the Old Testament is replaced by the centrifugal movement of the New Testament. The Old Testament ‘nations shall come to your light’ (Is. 60:3) is replaced by the New Testament ‘Go therefore and make disciples of all nations’ (Mt. 28:19)” (Scobie, “Israel and the Nations,” 301-302). He also believes there is “almost total absence from the Old Testament of any concern that the people of Israel should actively go out and share their knowledge of the one true God with the other nations of mankind” (ibid., 286).

<sup>8</sup> See passages like Gen 1:26-28; 9:1, 7; 12:1,4; 13:14-17; Gen 22; Exod 5:1; Ps 67; the passages of the Pentateuch where God sends Israel to destroy whole nations; the books of Daniel, Joel, Amos; and, evidently, the book of Jonah.

In light of the strong ties between the Old and the New Testaments, and a shared common purpose, the distinction between the two types of mission (centripetal in the Old and centrifugal in the New Testament) seems to be based on extra-biblical presuppositions and imposed on the text.<sup>9</sup>

Many scholars seem to believe that the attitude of God's people toward the nations justifies the idea that mission in the Old Testament is different from mission in the New. However, Israel's expressed duty toward the nations stands in tension with their failure to accomplish it. Scholars believe that the universalism (salvation offered to every nation and human being, not universal salvation) expressed throughout the Old Testament was not really understood by Israel.<sup>10</sup> While salvation seems to be offered to all nations, Israel continuously focused on the benefits and privileges of its election, ignoring the fact that in God's economy election implies service.<sup>11</sup>

Johannes Blauw articulates best the different approaches to the Testaments by pointing to the lack of centrifugal mission in the Old Testament. His book, *The*

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<sup>9</sup> The different directions may reflect people's attitudes and actions in biblical times rather than God's plans and intentions (e.g., Israel in the Old Testament looked for land to settle in, while the early Christian church in the New Testament gradually went out of Palestine toward the rest of the world).

<sup>10</sup> However, the Israelites must have understood mission as centrifugal by the time of Jesus, since he mentioned their missionary zeal in an approving way, describing it as "circling the land and water."

<sup>11</sup> "The theme of the relation of God's chosen people Israel to the other nations of humankind constitutes a test case and a major challenge to any would-be biblical theologian. In the Old Testament, Israel is a national group, while in the New Testament Christianity is a universal religion; how can such diverse Old Testament and New Testament materials be synthesized?" (Scobie, "Israel and the Nations: An Essay in Biblical Theology," 284). Johannes H. Bavinck is concerned with the future of the nations as described in the Old Testament. In *An Introduction to the Science of Missions* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1960), 11-24, he adopts a universalistic reading of the Old Testament, placing Israel's development and history in the context of the surrounding nations.

*Missionary Nature of the Church*, becomes a basis for espousing the different types of mission in the Old and New Testaments, and is quoted frequently by later authors.<sup>12</sup>

Blauw singles out the book of Jonah and Deutero-Isaiah as the only parts of the Old Testament where it is possible to see centrifugal mission. However, for him these passages seem to have been written for the purpose of teaching the narrow-minded Jews (represented by Jonah) a lesson, and were not necessarily a clear centrifugal sending.<sup>13</sup> His presuppositions play a major role in minimizing centrifugal mission in the Old Testament.

Moving from Blauw's position, David Burnett sees both aspects of mission in the Old Testament, and illustrates centripetal mission with the stories of the Queen of Sheba,

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<sup>12</sup> Johannes Blauw, *The Missionary Nature of the Church: A Survey of the Biblical Theology of Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974). While setting universalism as the point of departure, Blauw points to the Old Testament as the basis for any serious attempt to build a theological rationale for missions. He goes even further and states that no biblical (New Testament in particular) theology of mission can be constructed without the Old Testament missionary basis. Blauw's argument runs along the line that the New Testament (and implicitly Jesus' life) is heavily informed by, and built upon, the Old Testament. A more detailed analysis of Blauw's book will follow in the next chapter. Ken Gnanakan expresses a similar position, stating that "in recent approaches to a theology of mission it has been heartening to note the emphasis going right back to the Old Testament. This is a valuable corrective to the narrow approaches that were restricted to the New Testament and at the most a few references to well-worn passages in the Old Testament. . . . Theologies of mission that start with the New Testament lack the firm and full foundation of God's mission as it has gradually been revealed right from creation" (Ken Gnanakan, *Kingdom Concerns: A Biblical Exploration towards a Theology of Mission* [Bangalore, India: Theological Book Trust, 1989], 41).

<sup>13</sup> Blauw, *The Missionary Nature of the Church*, 34-35, 40, 50, 54, 66, 91. Although Johannes Blauw goes to the Old Testament for a mission theology basis, he hardly accepts that there is any mission in the Old Testament. The same opinion is shared by David Jacobus Bosch. Although recognizing some mission in the Old Testament, Bosch states that "mission is undefinable" (*Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, American Society of Missiology, vol. 16 [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991], 9). Even in the New Testament, he does not identify a "uniform view of mission but, rather, a variety of 'theologies of mission.'" In his opinion, the New Testament authors "were less interested in definitions of mission than in the missionary existence of their readers" (ibid., 16).

Ruth, and centrifugal mission with the book of Jonah. His examples of centrifugal mission, however, stop with that example.<sup>14</sup>

This current that seeks support for recognizing centrifugal mission as an integral part of the Old Testament became more prominent with Donald Senior and Carroll Stuhlmueller.<sup>15</sup> They began their study of the Old Testament “with the admission that, at first glance, the movement of Israel’s history and its Scriptures appears to be centripetal, or inward. But a careful analysis of biblical tradition uncovers powerful currents that swirl in the opposite direction.”<sup>16</sup> The authors note the “dialectic between centripetal and centrifugal forces, between flight from the secular and absorption of the secular, between a concern for self-identity and responsible interaction with one’s environment, between elect status as God’s chosen people and humble awareness of one’s solidarity with the entire human family.”<sup>17</sup>

Walter C. Kaiser Jr. has written a study completely focused on mission theology in the Old Testament where centrifugal mission is legitimately recognized.<sup>18</sup> He considers

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<sup>14</sup> David Burnett, *The Healing of the Nations: The Biblical Basis of the Mission of God*, Biblical Classics Library, vol. 18 (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1996), 52-53.

<sup>15</sup> Donald Senior and Carroll Stuhlmueller, *The Biblical Foundations for Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1983).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 315. Senior and Stuhlmueller notice that universalism and election are not completely opposites. They discover that “even though Israel treasured its identity as God’s elect people, at its best moments it recognized other signs of deep solidarity with the nonelect nations and with the dynamics of secular history outside the annals of its covenant” (ibid.).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 316.

<sup>18</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Mission in the Old Testament: Israel as a Light to the Nations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000). “The case for evangelizing the Gentiles had not been a recently devised switch in the plan of God, but had always been the long-term commitment of the living God who is a missionary God. This is the same case that is consistently, even if at times only rudimentarily, found in the entire corpus of the Old Testament” (ibid., 82).

that “generalizations that deny that any Israelite was ever sent as a missionary to anyone else, or that the Old Testament is totally built around a centripetal emphasis, can find little usefulness in a discussion of God’s call for Israel to be a light to the nations.”<sup>19</sup>

Kaiser does not agree that mission (especially centrifugal) is found only in the New Testament. “Missions cannot be an afterthought for the Old Testament: it is the heart and core of the plan of God.”<sup>20</sup>

Because Kaiser emphasizes centrifugal mission in the Old Testament, the integrative framework of mission does not clearly emerge. In addition, centripetal passages like Num 9:8; Ruth 3:18; 1 Sam 9:27; 12:7; 2 Chr 20:17; Ps 46:10; Jer 47:6; or Deut 4:6 need to be reconciled with centrifugal passages like Gen 12:1, 4; 13:14-17; Exod 5:1; or Jonah 1:1-2. A careful reading of all these passages in context seems to reveal a balanced approach (centrifugal-centripetal), making up two intertwined parts of the same picture that defy the imposed separation of the Testaments. The Old Testament treatment of the concept of mission appears to follow this balanced pattern.

This confusing situation in mission theology indicates a need for an honest statement about theological assumptions, an in-depth study of the Old Testament text in context, and a reevaluation of mission theology based on an integrative approach.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The centrifugal-centripetal model used to analyze mission in the Bible seems to be based on extra-biblical assumptions that lead to the separation of God’s missionary

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 37. Kaiser does not deny the universality already included in the centripetal approach, and believes it is foundational for the New Testament understanding of mission.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 38.

plan in the Old Testament as centripetal, and in the New Testament as centrifugal, thus dividing the Scripture. The hermeneutics used to rediscover mission in the Old Testament are not rooted in that part of the Scripture nor do they cover the entire text of the Bible. As a result, different solutions have been proposed for a missionary reading of Scripture, solutions that support the authors' presuppositions, but that are often not grounded in the Bible. A comprehensive framework that will interpret mission in the whole Scripture is missing in mission theology attempts.

### **Purpose of the Research**

The purpose of this dissertation is to (1) check the hermeneutical and theological assumptions behind previous attempts to define mission in the Old Testament; and (2) analyze the missionary view coming out of the text of the Hebrew Bible by looking at explicit and implicit evidences that may support the existence of an all-encompassing framework for mission in the Bible. The study will try to assess whether Israel's understanding of mission reveals a progression or a regression, and seeks to discover what God's original missionary plan for humans was. The study will also compare the concept of mission in the Old Testament with its counterpart in the New Testament.

### **Justification for the Research**

Previous Old Testament mission studies analyzed the concept of mission in the Old Testament, its centrifugal component in this complex part of Scripture, or its balance with centripetal mission from particular hermeneutical and theological positions. In addition, no study has yet attempted to answer the question of what philosophical or theological presuppositions may lie behind each author's understanding of Old Testament mission.

The history of missiological readings of the Old Testament (and of the entire Bible) has been influenced by (1) the events taking place in the mission fields, and (2) by the developments in Old Testament theological interpretation. Mission theologies have been written to support such developments. For example, before or after major missionary conferences, scholars or missiologists have been commissioned to write a new work on mission theology to support the new approach. Such works have been written in connection with the Willingen Conference in 1952, before and after the merging of the International Missionary Committee with the World Council of Churches in 1961, and after the Lausanne Conference in 1972.

Mission theologies produced by Harold Rowley, Henry Goerner, Robert Martin-Achard, Johannes Blauw, and Andre Rétif and Pierre Lamarche aimed to support the ecumenical view of mission that was developing during those days. Works produced by John Stott, George Peters, or Richard De Ridder reacted to the the ecumenical trends in mission by defending the traditional conservative evangelical approach. However, Catholic theologians such as Donald Senior and Carroll Stuhlmueller, Lucien Legrand, Andreas J. Köstenberger, and Peter T. O'Brien, or James Okoye, represent a third major strand of mission theology influenced strongly by a historical-critical approach to the Bible. The evangelical, Catholic, and ecumenical theologians each defend their particular presuppositions.

More recently the mission theology field was enriched by studies written by Arthur Glasser, Francis DuBose, David Filbeck, Walter Kaiser, and Christopher Wright, all of them looking for a thematic approach to the Old Testament and to the entire Bible.

Unfortunately, none of these attempts treats the Scripture in its entirety or allows the Bible to completely inform the reading and interpretation.<sup>21</sup>

This research addresses a widespread and popular opinion, prevalent in most of the works written on the subject of mission, that God's mission in each of the two Testaments of the Bible was different. It looks at the major hermeneutical flaws of these works and tries to eliminate them, using the biblical conclusions already uncovered. The research implies an in-depth reading of the Old Testament taking into consideration that Hebrew thinking is not always explicitly spelled out, but has an implicit sense and meaning. Concrete actions may, at best, be only suggested in the biblical text; sometimes they may not be evident at all, but implied in the general context. Even more challenging, some Old Testament passages seemed to conflict with other passages until a careful reading in context reveals a balanced approach, made up of different parts of the same picture.<sup>22</sup>

Each understanding of the biblical concept of mission is influenced by and carries profound hermeneutical implications. The popular idea that centripetal mission belongs to the Old Testament, while centrifugal mission belongs to the New, implies a gap between Testaments. One has to deal with underlying theological issues about biblical inspiration and revelation. The frequent result is that the Old Testament is often

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<sup>21</sup> For example, Walter C. Kaiser Jr. has a much better view of the Old Testament in his book than previous or later studies. However, it lacks in comprehensiveness because he tries mainly to prove that centrifugal mission exists in the Old Testament. The centrifugal-centripetal *balance* is also underdeveloped in his otherwise useful study.

<sup>22</sup> See Senior and Stuhmueller, *The Biblical Foundations for Mission*, 315-316.



considered no longer valid or binding.<sup>23</sup> The New Testament is viewed as superior to the Old Testament, and mission or theology is considered from different perspectives when one moves from the Old to the New Testament.<sup>24</sup>

These assumptions are so popular they are seldom questioned. If the New Testament is superior to the Old, some can see in the two Testaments a different salvation offered by a different God with a different mission (static versus dynamic). Israel, then, would be justified in doing nothing but waiting for the nations to come to Jerusalem.

Such conclusions and implications do not reflect the biblical view. In its entirety, the Bible describes YHWH as a missionary God, and affirms that everything he does has a missionary purpose. As a result of God's inspiration, the Bible should be seen and read as a missionary book from its beginning, presenting an unchanging God with an unchanging mission.<sup>25</sup>

This study seeks to clarify that balance of the mission concept and the hermeneutical unity of the Testaments through a comprehensive approach to the Bible.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> See Christopher Wright's strange conclusions regarding dietary laws in *The Mission of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 244, 305, 373, 508.

<sup>24</sup> There is often an assumption that there is a progression in revelation, and God "progressively" educates humankind in steps or phases. The same assumption is then applied to mission (see Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 15-55; 368-510, and Burnett, *The Healing of the Nations*, 187).

<sup>25</sup> Francis DuBose shows that the more explicit centrifugal aspect of the New Testament is only a continuation and development of what already appears in the Old (Francis M. DuBose, *God Who Sends: A Fresh Quest for Biblical Mission* [Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1983], 41-52).

<sup>26</sup> The need to study the Old Testament in its own context is noticed by David Filbeck, which he argues is a missionary context. He calls for a consistent hermeneutic, approaching the Bible as a whole (David Filbeck, *Yes, God of the Gentiles, Too: The Missionary Message of the Old Testament* [Wheaton, IL: Billy Graham Center, 1994]. See also Kane, *The Christian World Mission*, 25-33). Hermeneutical considerations also seem to become the concern of contemporary theologians.

Since studies in Old Testament mission theology are not frequent in the theological literature, this dissertation will contribute to fill a vacuum in this particular area of Old Testament theology.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

This study does not claim to be unbiased or presuppositionless but will allow the text to impose the hermeneutical and theological agenda by taking the Scriptures seriously. Since the topic is broad, I will limit it to hermeneutical and theological concepts. I do not deal in detail with such issues as authorship, date, historicity, or in-depth exegesis of biblical passages.

The study will focus primarily on the Old Testament, but references to the New Testament will be used for comparison. The final selection of the passages used in the dissertation will be based on their relevance for mission theology and on their relation to the specific subject of this research. Theological works will be chosen to illustrate several understandings of mission in the Old Testament and the assumptions behind them.

Since the purpose of the research is to analyze the concept of mission in the Old Testament, looking for evidences that support a comprehensive framework for mission, I will not deal with all aspects of Old Testament theology, or even Old Testament missiology. Different elements of a theology of mission will be used only if they serve the stated purpose. Most of the theological works that deal with the subject have been written during the twentieth century, and are in English.

### **Methodology**

Since this study investigates Old Testament mission theology and the presuppositions used that influence the reading of the first part of Scripture, I will survey

the major works on mission theology that address the Old Testament and highlight the hermeneutical assumptions different authors work from. Chapter 2 analyzes a number of mission theology works representative for different periods of the twentieth century and assesses how they define mission, their position on the unity of Scripture, and the relationship between centrifugal and centripetal mission.

Chapter 3 takes the results of the survey and compares them with the assumptions contained in the Bible. Several theological trends and schools of thought, the hermeneutical assumptions which inform them, as well as their impact on mission theology and the centrifugal-centripetal model are then analyzed.

Chapter 4 looks at the biblical presuppositions that should inform the reading of the text. The Old Testament is treated as a whole, as well as the entire Scripture, trying to understand the mind-set of the writers of different types of biblical literature and the assumptions of the people involved in various historical events. Examples of areas that need special attention include: (1) Old Testament passages that reveal God's character and his plan for all the nations, (2) the meaning of "*missio Dei*" and of "sending" in the Old Testament (especially in the book of Genesis) and its implications for Israel, (3) the general framework of mission in the whole Scripture, and (4) the relationship between the missionary understanding of Jesus and the disciples and the Old Testament writings they knew. Based on the previous steps, I attempt to develop a hermeneutical approach that preserves the theological framework and pattern of mission in the Old Testament while remaining faithful to the whole Bible.

Chapter 5 summarizes the findings, looking at the theological implications of this holistic hermeneutic, as well as at some practical implications for mission.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter surveys the main contributions to the development and understanding of mission theology in the Old Testament with a particular focus on the definitions of mission, hermeneutical issues (presuppositions, unity of Scripture, theological influences, etc.), and the discussion about the centrifugal-centripetal model. The surveyed works will be organized chronologically covering the twentieth century to the present. Old Testament theology works are referred to as a necessary background for understanding the developments and influences on Old Testament mission theology. The statements and positions expressed in this chapter belong to the authors surveyed.

#### **The “Old Missionary Era” (up to 1910)**

In his book, *Gospel, Church, and Kingdom: Comparative Studies in World Mission Theology*, James Scherer divides the understanding of mission into several historical periods.<sup>1</sup> The traditional understanding of mission coming out of the nineteenth century was based on the belief that the gospel would conquer the whole world in a progressive and triumphalistic wave. The focus was on establishing God’s kingdom in every country and corner of the earth. Although mission theology did not exist as a

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<sup>1</sup> James A. Scherer, *Gospel, Church, and Kingdom: Comparative Studies in World Mission Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1987). See also Charles Van Engen, *Mission on the Way: Issues in Mission Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996), 127-144.

theological branch at the time, the topic is scantily addressed in Old Testament theology works. William O. Carver is a representative of this period's view of mission and its theological basis.<sup>2</sup> The Edinburgh Missionary Conference and the First World War were still in the future. The most influential Old Testament study at the beginning of the 20th century is Julius Wellhausen's *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel*, where historical criticism (the Documentary Hypothesis) undermines the unity of the Scripture.<sup>3</sup> The main assumption is that "Israelite religion evolved from roots in nature religion similar to other ancient Canaanite religions,"<sup>4</sup> which allows for mission by attraction in the later periods of Old Testament history, based on his concept of ethical monotheism.

#### William Owen Carver

W. O. Carver is considered one of the initiators of the discussion about mission theology in the 20th-century English-speaking world.<sup>5</sup> His first book, *Missions in the Plan of the Ages*,<sup>6</sup> debuts with a definition of missions as "the extensive realization of God's redemptive purpose in Christ by means of human messengers." It is "the

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<sup>2</sup> Mission theology was not fully developed at this early time of the twentieth century.

<sup>3</sup> Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel* (New York: Meridian Books, 1957).

<sup>4</sup> Paul R. House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998), 26. "No segment of biblical studies, not even those related to the New Testament, was unaffected by its [*Prolegomena*] influence. In many ways this volume dictates a large portion of the agenda in Old Testament research to this day" (ibid., 25).

<sup>5</sup> Carver follows in the footsteps of German authors E. Riehm, "Der Missionsgedanke im Alten Testament," *Allgemeine Missions-Zeitschrift* 7 (1880): 453-465; and Max Richard Hermann Löhr, *Der Missionsgedanke im Alten Testament: Ein Betrag zur alttestamentlichen Religionsgeschichte* (Freiburg and Leipzig: Mohr, 1896).

<sup>6</sup> William Owen Carver, *Missions in the Plan of the Ages* (London: Fleming H. Revell, 1909).

proclamation of the Good News of the kingdom where it is news, . . . the method by which God is now carrying forward His plan of the ages.”<sup>7</sup> If the origin of mission is “ultimately to be found in the heart of God,” the historical origin of mission is seen in Jesus Christ, while the practical origin is in the Holy Spirit who guides the church.<sup>8</sup> Although this reflects the general understanding that mission begins in the New Testament, Carver argues that the same love of God that motivates Jesus’ mission has already been expressed in the Old Testament. This is an incipient Trinitarian mission.

As the textbook for mission, the Bible simply contains the missionary “idea.” Even Jesus and Paul found support for their mission in the Old Testament, the Scripture of the time.<sup>9</sup> Salvation is offered to everyone, so mission will include the Gentiles both as target and medium.<sup>10</sup> The author quotes the Old Testament to prove that “application of this principle to the missionary enterprise abounds in the Scriptures,” and as proof of God’s inclusion of the Gentiles.<sup>11</sup>

Discussing the tension between election and general providence, Carver suggests that mission might be the bridge between them.<sup>12</sup> He notices a difference between God’s

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 11, 27.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>9</sup> Carver acknowledges that Jesus found the message about himself written when he came on earth, “so that in a very real sense God had been making this message from the beginning of the race, in His revelation to the race” (ibid., 156). Israel had its mission before Christ’s coming on earth, so the missionary message was active long before.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 33, 37-38.

<sup>11</sup> Isa 44:24-45:25; 60:1-14; 66:18-24. “When priests and Levites are taken from all the nations it will mean that the people of these nations have come to worship Jehovah” (ibid., 35).

<sup>12</sup> “Possibly there is less of essential distinction between providence and election than we usually think” (ibid., 36).

intention to reach all nations by electing Israel as a special people, and the way they interpreted their election, retaining the blessing that was bestowed upon them.<sup>13</sup> Thus, “missions are God’s method of bringing humanity to its ideal,” which is the opportunity to know God through Jesus Christ.<sup>14</sup> However, Carver argues that “a universal obligation could not lie on Israel to evangelize the world in the Christian sense: but a right spirit towards all men was needful and obligatory and the missionary plan must lie, explicit or implicit, in God’s revelation. Otherwise there were no true revelation of God’s self.”<sup>15</sup>

The author divides the Old Testament in periods and emphasizes that God’s dealing with humanity as a unit in the first eleven chapters of Genesis is the background for Abraham’s election. This is followed by a period of national formation from Abraham to Samuel. From Saul to the captivity, the nation goes through ups and downs while the message is carried forward by the prophets. The last period before Christ’s coming is marked by an erroneous understanding that Messiah’s kingdom is a Jewish dominion, so the missionary message seems to be twisted to fit their understanding.

Carver identifies three main missionary methods: attraction, permeation, and conquest, and labels mission according to the two Testaments into a preparation period (to Christ) and a progress period (from Christ).<sup>16</sup> He indicates that during the preparation

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<sup>13</sup> Melchizedek, Job, Balaam, Naaman, the widow of Zarephath, Cyrus, and Nebuchadnezzar are Old Testament examples of God dealing with non-Israelites (ibid., 166-167).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 46. See also ibid., 134.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 156.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 186-192. There should be no surprise that Carver speaks about conquest since at the time colonialism was at its heyday. “Jesus and His Church are imperialistic. This is the method demanded by the condition of the world” (ibid., 189). The Edinburgh Mission conference has not yet taken place (1910), and the missionaries were still converting “heathens.” The assumed superiority of the Western missions is evident.

period “Kingdom growth could not now be by conquest, except by little here and there; and what was gained by attraction and done by permeation it would be difficult to trace with any show of accuracy.”<sup>17</sup>

The author believes that whatever mission was done by Israel was *indirect* and *undersigned*. It was done rather by *implication*, through God’s presence in Israel and his ethical and spiritual superiority to all heathen conceptions of deity.<sup>18</sup> Carver could not find any “direct, conscious and purposeful missionary effort. . . . How many came to believe in the God of Israel or how intelligently and consistently they believed it is not possible to say.”<sup>19</sup> Although recognizing that the post-exilic period witnessed the most active missionary efforts of the Jews, these are considered to be based on wrong reasons.<sup>20</sup> However, Carver ends his book by including the prophecies of Isaiah among those who announce the missionary consummation, especially the Servant Songs.

### **The Post-Edinburgh Era (1910-1952)**

Although before the Edinburgh conference in 1910 the hopes of converting everyone to Christ were very high, the speakers at this event expressed uneasiness with

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 227. He prefers that the entire period should be treated only as preparatory for the coming of Messiah and his missions. Jonah is described as an exception, an unwilling missionary anyway, while Moses, the Psalmists, the prophets, Daniel, Ezra, and Nehemiah as simply examples of fidelity.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 233-234.

<sup>19</sup> “The law provides for the reception and treatment of converts but the records do not show efforts to win these nor the accession of any great numbers” (ibid., 237-238, 241).

<sup>20</sup> “The motives are mixed; partly for removing the burden of reproach by making their position understood; partly pride of their better religion and ethics; partly the stubborn zeal of mere proselyting; partly zeal for the God of Israel; partly the hope of hastening the day when Jerusalem should rule the earth as many believed: of love for men one finds very little” (ibid., 242).



the way colonial powers used the missionary efforts to their advantage and benefit. There were voices who claimed that Christianity would be able to finish the task of evangelizing every person on earth during that generation. However, the paradigm changed from certainty to possibility. Theologians started to use the term *universality* instead of *universalism* but the focus was still on mission strategy rather than the motivation and basis of mission. Issues of theological differences were not on the conference agenda. However, the establishment of the committee that later became the International Missionary Council (IMC, 1921) allowed for theological discussions in the light of the social and political events during the first half of the twentieth century.

Even though starting with a focus on preserving the cooperation and the unity of the missionary efforts, the IMC ended up gradually changing the agenda towards the theological basis of mission. Although the Old Testament was no longer considered a unity but a collection of documents from different times and sources, Karl Barth attempted to turn from historicism to the unity and the divine revelation and inspiration of the Bible, while Walter Eichrodt emphasized the value and role of the covenant.<sup>21</sup> Two theologians of this period who write about mission are Harold H. Rowley and Henry Goerner; one writes before while the other during the Second World War.

#### Harold H. Rowley

H. H. Rowley's work on the Old Testament is quite extensive, with his works being frequently quoted by other authors. He is one of the first to address at length the issue of Mission (Theology) in the Old Testament. The first edition of *Israel's Mission to*

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<sup>21</sup> See Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1961), 1:30-31; see also Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh, UK: T&T Clark, 1936).

*the World* (1939) is designed to be “useful . . . to those who are charged with the task of teaching the Old Testament.”<sup>22</sup>

Rowley proposes a wider vision of the Jewish Scriptures by moving from the history of the Hebrew religion to its spirit and message. He indicates that, although “the study of Israel’s mission to the Gentiles will direct us to the post-exilic period” it does not imply “that it had no foundation in pre-exilic days.”<sup>23</sup>

The author’s main focus is the Deutero-Isaiah prophecy regarding the whole human race as God’s all-embracing Kingdom of God.<sup>24</sup> He believes there is a difference between the pre-exilic understanding of mission and the post-exilic one.<sup>25</sup> Rowley differentiates between Israel’s specific mission as servant to the nations and the beauty of

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<sup>22</sup> H. H. Rowley, *Israel’s Mission to the World* (London: SCM, 1939), v.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 2. In order to discover and clarify some of Rowley’s hermeneutical assumptions, one has to look into some of Rowley’s other writings. He claims to uphold the “fundamental unity” of the Bible, and particularly that of the Old Testament: “No part can be adequately studied save in the setting of the whole” (Rowley, *The Missionary Message of the Old Testament*, 9). However, it is interesting to study what he means by the unity of the Old Testament since he suggests that “for any study of Old Testament thought it is well to begin with Moses, who is the real founder of Old Testament religion” (ibid., 11). Rowley gives no answer to what happens to the pre-mosaic period. However, his view of how Israel formed as a nation leads to a double religion for a start. In spite of his assumption regarding Israel’s birth, one can conclude that other nations were God’s children, too. God blesses and assigns them a role in his plans. Assyria might be a good example (ibid., 24). His view on the relationships between the Testaments is expressed in the following words: “While it is true that the Old Testament looks forward to something beyond itself, and the New Testament looks back to the Old Testament, so that in a real sense they belong to one another and form a single whole, the Old Testament is not to be read as a Christian book. It is an essential part of the Christian Bible, but it is not a part in which the meaning of the whole is to be found” (idem, *The Faith of Israel*, 14).

<sup>24</sup> Rowley shares the critical view of his day that the book of Isaiah has been written by more than one author.

<sup>25</sup> Rowley believes in a progressive revelation and development of thought in the Old Testament. “The kind of unity the writer sees in the Bible is a dynamic unity and not a static unity.” He also recognizes development from the Old Testament to the New (idem, *The Unity of the Bible* [Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1953], 7). He is upholding the unity of inspiration in the whole Scripture, and recognizes the fulfillment of the Old Testament in the New.

the Hebrew religion that attracts people in a centripetal way.<sup>26</sup> In the Servant Songs in Isaiah he recognizes both the individual and collective identity of the Servant, and points out that the Servant has a twofold mission, both for Israel and for the nations. Rowley's goal is to convince his readers that Israel's vision includes the whole world.<sup>27</sup>

Describing the book of Jonah, Rowley admits it shows an "interest in the mission of Israel to the Gentiles," and "fuses the concept that God is love, as expressed by Hosea, with the message of Deutero-Isaiah that emphasizes the wideness of God's love to include all people regardless of ethnicity. The vision of God's love and mercy, and its further acceptance, compels one to be a missionary."<sup>28</sup>

From this universalistic wideness, Rowley moves on to discuss particularism (and proselytism and exclusivism), describing it as a necessary survival method during the Babylonian exile.<sup>29</sup> He believes the change of tone in post-exilic literature is due to the idealistic view of the prophets who consider Judaism a religion so well established and self-confident that it bursts its shell and becomes a world-wide religion. The reality forces the returning remnant to tone down its religious fervor and mission to the world.

Rowley rejects the idea that the book of Ruth might be a reaction to such a narrow particularism, indicating that she was already a proselyte before marrying Boaz. He claims that "in its most exclusive phases, Judaism did not condemn marriage with a

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<sup>26</sup> Rowley, *Israel's Mission to the World*, 10.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>28</sup> "Israel was called to a mission of service, service that knew no limits, service that should be achieved in testimony and in suffering" (*ibid.*, 32, 38).

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 42. The author claims that Deutero-Isaiah represents the first-fruits of particularism (and its writing date is obviously considered a later one).

proselyte.”<sup>30</sup> Although he believes particularism was necessary for the Jews to survive, and taught them a lesson, it also encouraged centripetal mission through proselytism.<sup>31</sup>

As reformers, Ezra and Nehemiah are seen as revivalists of the Jewish particularism, reinforcing their identity as a chosen people with laws. Judaism was to survive only by avoiding Gentiles. The initial wider vision Rowley proposes runs in a balanced tension with this narrow Jewish religious particularism, which was soon joined by a cultural and ethnic variant. Israel started to fight against surrounding nations and their attempts to wipe out the Jewish nation. Persians, Greeks, and Romans became a threat to both their national identity and religious life.

Rowley notes the missionary role of those Jews who remained in the Diaspora. Although they were not there by their own initiative, these Jews learned the local languages and adapted to the local culture, preserving their Jewish identity and religious traditions through a particularism that did not exclude missionary zeal.<sup>32</sup>

Jewish Rabbinical schools played an important role in preserving religious identity, but had no real missionary input, although they did not oppose it. “First-century Judaism . . . estimated the study of Torah more highly than the work of sharing its

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 48. The author also rejects the suggestion that the book is a political tract to prove that Moabite blood ran through David’s ancestry.

<sup>31</sup> Rowley believes God “is an electing God” and there is nothing arbitrary in the divine choice (*The Missionary Message of the Old Testament*, 14). He insists on the relationship between election and service, emphasizing that the role behind election is not only to show God’s character, but to learn a lesson that could be achieved only through service. This is no election for honor or privileges, but for service. “Too often Israel proudly boasted of the privilege of her election and forgot its purpose, and the prophets had to remind her that the rejection of the purpose of the election involved the abandonment of the election” (ibid., 15).

<sup>32</sup> “In the mission of Israel to the Gentiles the defensive work of particularism played a part as truly as the noble inspiration of Deutero-Isaiah, for defence offers its contribution to the triumph of a cause as well as offence” (ibid., 71).

treasures with men of alien race.”<sup>33</sup> There was no explicit concern for the rest of the world. The result was self-centeredness. Rowley blames the circumstances for Israel’s missionary non-combat.<sup>34</sup> He considers that Christianity inherited Israel’s mission and that the true Israel’s mission (“aggression” as he calls it) came only during the Christian era. The Church became Israel’s mission agent.<sup>35</sup>

The author indicates that Jesus, as Christianity’s representative, inherited the roles assigned to Israel. The Old Testament’s streams of thought about the Messiah, the Son of Man, and the Suffering Servant (found in the Servant Songs in Isaiah) influenced Jesus’ own identity and mission.<sup>36</sup> Rowley believes that Jesus more predominantly played the role of the Servant than that of Messiah or the Son of Man. However, his mission was characterized by universalism, seeking and finding the lost.

Rowley believes that the centrifugal effect of the Great Commission (Matt 28:19) was already forecast in the Old Testament.<sup>37</sup> Although both movements were based on the same Scriptures and heritage, Israel simply remained the repository of God’s

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>34</sup> “Israel had been charged with a mission. Her seers had perceived this, and had unfolded to her that mission. But circumstances had not aided her to address herself to it, nor was she herself ready for it. And so, in particularism, she had turned in upon herself” (ibid., 78).

<sup>35</sup> “Christianity took over the conception of a world mission from Judaism, and it was inspired to attempt the conquest of the world by those whose legacy it inherited” (ibid., 80).

<sup>36</sup> “It is quite impossible to understand the mission of Christianity, save in the light of the Old Testament, whose ideas and whose teaching entered so deeply into its Founder’s thought” (ibid., 85).

<sup>37</sup> “That explicit command had already been implicit in much that had gone before” (ibid., 87).

instructions.<sup>38</sup> Rowley indicates that election functions in the context of freedom of response. He explains Israel's non-involvement in mission (especially centrifugal): "God chooses those who respond to his choice," and Israel did not respond as God expected.<sup>39</sup>

Rowley concludes that the role of the Old Testament is simply to form a basis for the church's mission,<sup>40</sup> and that "the mission of Israel to the Gentiles, claimed and appropriated by the Church, is yet incompletely fulfilled."<sup>41</sup>

### Henry Cornell Goerner

Henry Cornell Goerner wrote a couple of books that deal with his understanding of mission. The first, *"Thus It Is Written": The Missionary Motif in the Scriptures*, will be the focus of this analysis.<sup>42</sup> In choosing the title *Thus It Is Written*, Henry Cornell Goerner uses the phrase in Luke 24:46 as a justification for going to the Old Testament in search of a biblical basis for mission.

Convinced that God has a universal purpose, the author states that only the Bible can present God's explanation of his cosmic purpose. Goerner believes Gen 12:1-3 is the first mention of this purpose and plan and that the previous eleven chapters are only

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<sup>38</sup> "Judaism gave much more to the Church and to the world than we have yet acknowledged. To the Church she gave a sense of mission, a world vision, and a conception of the great task" (ibid., 100).

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>40</sup> "He who would rightly read the Old Testament, must read it not as a mere record of events, but as the vehicle of a great revelation" (ibid., 127).

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>42</sup> Henry Cornell Goerner, *"Thus It Is Written": The Missionary Motif in the Scriptures* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1944). The sequel, *All Nations in God's Purpose* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1979), is largely a repetition of Goerner's first work.

“explanatory of God’s action in calling Abraham.”<sup>43</sup> God used an *en masse* approach in Gen 1-11, while from Gen 12 he changed the approach by starting with an individual and moving through his circles of influence.<sup>44</sup>

In assessing God’s method, Goerner identifies four elements: the principle of election, the blessing of the chosen, the commissioning of the chosen, and the universal purpose of God. Election is for service and not based on merits. As a chosen one, Abraham was blessed not only materially but mainly spiritually, and was supposed to pass on such spiritual blessings to others because “with every blessing there is a corresponding obligation.”<sup>45</sup>

Abraham and his heirs had to learn that God’s character is not only love and mercy, but also righteousness and judgment. God requires and rewards absolute, unquestioning obedience, but not human sacrifice, and they had to share this truth about the abolition of human sacrifice, as illustrated on Mount Moriah, with the world. God’s final goal is to make himself known to all peoples on earth as the only God (monotheism). Polytheism is a negation of God’s character.

The particularistic choice of Abraham and his descendants is presented in balance with God’s universalistic goal. The choosing of one nation does not exclude the others

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<sup>43</sup> Goerner, *Thus It Is Written*, 2.

<sup>44</sup> “Thus far God had been dealing with the human race as a whole. His concern obviously was with the entire human family. . . . The call of Abraham marks the inauguration of the method by which God has been dealing with the human race from that day (about 2000 B.C.) until the present time” (ibid., 3, 4).

<sup>45</sup> “He was granted an intimate fellowship with God. He was taken into the counsels of God. He was allowed to know in advance the plans of God. There had been revealed to him the mind and character of God. . . . God always blesses his chosen instruments. . . . Whatever is received is to be shared. Following each benediction is a binding commission. The blessed elect are always responsible stewards” (ibid., 5).

from God's concern (Exod 19:3-6). In its role as priest, Israel is called to make God and his ways known to the nations according to the details and instructions contained in the Torah.<sup>46</sup> Israel was supposed to help other nations reach the same level of civilization and religious elevation. "If only Israel had kept constantly before her this clearly-stated purpose for her national existence!"<sup>47</sup>

The author chooses Rahab, Ruth, Naaman, and Elijah's acceptance by the widow at Zarephath as examples that "the religion of Jehovah was not a racial religion."<sup>48</sup> However, Israel demonstrates more and more an intensely nationalistic focus. The books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther breathe the exclusivist feelings of a nation just returned from exile, looking for identity and status. In the midst of such a difficult time, Ezra shows the impact on other nations. The decrees of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes specifically refer to the sovereign God.<sup>49</sup> Goerner also surveys the Psalms and concludes that such words as "all the earth," "all peoples," and "all nations" occur frequently, indicating a clear understanding of God's world-embracing purpose.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> "A kingdom of priests, a priest nation, can have no significance except in relationship with the other nations of the earth" (ibid., 14).

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 15. The laws would create a disciplined people, the ceremonies would help them understand God's character, while the punishment was supposed to teach them that every action and attitude has consequences.

<sup>48</sup> "In no period of her history was the nation of Israel racially exclusive, nor was the religion of Jehovah restricted to those of Jacob's line" (ibid., 19-20).

<sup>49</sup> "Jehovah is not the God of the Jews only, but also of the whole world. . . . The Captivity had proved to be an effective means of making Jehovah known to other nations" (ibid., 22).

<sup>50</sup> "They had before them, and perhaps piously chanted on occasion, great missionary hymns which set forth God's purpose to include all mankind in his saving grace, and that by means of the Chosen People as his instrument" (ibid., 27).



The prophets reminded Israel that “God had a purpose which went far beyond Israel to include all the nations of the earth. They called Israel to assume her function as an instrument in God’s hands for the accomplishment of his worldwide purpose.”<sup>51</sup> All peoples are equal before God and responsible according to the blessings received.

Summarizing the Old Testament survey, Goerner points out the fact that God’s love for the nations does not start with the New Testament. “The universal gospel . . . dominates and explains the Old Testament. The Lamb was slain ‘from the foundations of the world.’ God from eternity has purposed the salvation of all mankind. . . . Even while his dealings were with a special people, his loving eye was upon all the peoples.”<sup>52</sup>

If the first eleven chapters of the Bible have the human race as a focus, the rest of the Old Testament is dealing with Israel, whose election is not for salvation but for service. This explains the severity of punishments when Israel forgets its role, the nations also watching to see how God treats a disobeying nation.

But God’s choice is also conditional. Abraham is told about the covenantal aspect, and later Israel and Moses are told about it (Exod 19:5). “The important words here are ‘if . . . then. . . .’”<sup>53</sup> The covenantal language was “the most distinctive feature of the religion of Israel. Jehovah was the covenant-making and covenant-keeping God.”<sup>54</sup> But God elected other peoples “for other purposes and . . . roles. Thus God was not departing

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>53</sup> “In the event of disobedience and the breaking of the covenant, God was to be no longer bound to regard this as his Chosen People. For, after all, ‘all the earth was his,’ and there were other peoples of whom he might make choice” (ibid., 46).

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

from his usual way of dealing with the nations when he made choice of Abraham; he was merely applying a universal principle to a particular people for a particular purpose.”<sup>55</sup>

The author demonstrates that God had the same universal purpose in both Testaments, the New bringing nothing new in God’s plans. “His purpose to redeem all the nations was not a new purpose dating from the Christian Era; it was his eternal and unchanging purpose.”<sup>56</sup> God did not change his method from one Testament to the other either. As a prophet, Jesus espoused the same instrumental and conditional message to Israel, warning of judgment and destruction for unfaithfulness and indicating that race and nationalism does not guarantee membership as the Chosen People.

Although Jesus’ work seems to be centripetal, Goerner explains that a prophet’s role implied a first *extensive* phase to the Jewish nation as a whole, hoping for their repentance, while in the second *intensive* phase, Jesus trained a small group of disciples. The author shows that Jesus’ apparent lack of concern for Gentiles was only a question of strategy, and demonstrates that Jesus denied the Greeks’ request to see him because he was on a mission to the cross. Going into Greek territory would have meant less persecution from the Jews and failure in his sacrificial plans.<sup>57</sup>

Goerner notices that there is more than a Great Commission in the New Testament, possibly the same commission being repeated several times, in different instances and contexts. In his view “the commissions were not new instructions given

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 99.

after his resurrection, but old instructions given many times before his death and now repeated and understood for the first time.”<sup>58</sup>

Paul exhibits the same predilection for the Old Testament and the nations, as well as the book of Acts.<sup>59</sup> In fact, Paul is imprisoned based on the same arguments that killed Jesus and Stephen: He is a traitor to the Jewish nation because he preaches salvation to the Gentiles.

Goerner concludes that God’s universal purpose to redeem all the families of the earth by means of a Chosen People is “the golden thread which ties together the Old and the New, giving meaning to much in the Bible which might otherwise appear meaningless. . . . This is the theme which makes of the Bible one book, and not a collection of unrelated writings.”<sup>60</sup>

### **The Post-Willingen Era (1952-1961)**

Since its beginning in 1921, the IMC organized a series of conferences that culminated with the one held at Willingen in 1952. Each successive conference illustrated the theological differences between the participants, but also the challenges posed by a rapidly changing society. The Edinburgh confidence about finishing the task in that generation gave way to an insecurity and uncertainty of the theological basis for the missionary task. Questions of “what went wrong?” forced missionary bodies to come up with studies that would explain the apparent failure. However, the approach also sought

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 108. The commissions studied are Luke 24:44-49; John 20:19-23, 26-28; Mark 16:14-18; John 21:1-23; Matt 28:16-20; and Acts 1:6-11.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 140.

to secure biblical support for the general contextual understanding of mission and to move towards a Trinitarian understanding of mission, placing the responsibility of mission on God's shoulders. The new attempts at a mission theology took place in the context of George E. Wright's and Gerhard von Rad's Old Testament theologies.<sup>61</sup> Wright challenged the previous theory of evolutionary understanding of Israel's history and of God's revelation, emphasizing the concept of salvation history (*Heilsgeschichte*) and an authentic monotheistic covenant at Sinai. He proposed that Israel's faith was from the beginning distinct from the polytheistic Canaanite religions, its mission being to challenge them. Von Rad returned to the unity of the Testaments by opening again the understanding of the Old Testament from a closed entity to a relationship with the New Testament and its events. He also looked for thematic threads in the Old Testament (like promise-fulfillment), separating the confessions of Israel from its history as presented by critical scholars.

#### Robert Martin-Achard

During the demise of the missionary movement in Africa and Asia, Robert Martin-Achard turns to the Bible for an understanding of the "necessity, purpose, and methods of mission."<sup>62</sup> Noticing that theologians such as Adolf von Harnack, Joachim Jeremias, and Bengt Sundkler focus mainly on the New Testament, Martin-Achard points to the Old Testament and asks "to what extent Jesus drew on the witness of the Old

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<sup>61</sup> George Ernest Wright, *God Who Acts: Biblical Theology as Recital* (London, SCM Press, 1952); Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962).

<sup>62</sup> Robert Martin-Achard, *A Light to the Nations: A Study of the Old Testament Conception of Israel's Mission to the World*, 2nd ed. (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1962), 1. The first edition was published in 1959.

Testament in order to proclaim the final salvation of the heathen.” He finds that Israel’s task was to “make the Gentiles recognize Yahweh as their true God.”<sup>63</sup>

Martin-Achard delineates between universalism (conversion is not required) and mission (which requires conversion). He rejects the process of assimilation of foreigners (like Ruth), as well as proselytism (called “national propaganda”). The author defines mission as “the belief that the whole community has a task to fulfill on behalf of all mankind.”<sup>64</sup>

Noting that Löhr’s statement about mission in the Old Testament has not changed in sixty years and quoting Rowley when he says that Moses is the first known missionary, Martin-Achard sets to discover Israel’s understanding of mission for the Gentiles, announcing that the “essential unity of the Old Testament Scripture in its outlook on mission” will be preserved.<sup>65</sup> He starts with the so-called Deutero-Isaiah, the “universalistic” prophet but at the same time “a missionary one.”<sup>66</sup> According to Isaiah, Israel’s task is to make Yahweh known to the Gentiles. The author quotes A. Lods’s conclusions that since Yahweh is the only God and Israel his only servant, this people has been given the responsibility to spread the word about Yahweh.

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 2, 3.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>65</sup> M. Löhr states that in the Old Testament the concept of mission is peripheral, involves the prophetic activity but reaches its peak only when prophetism is on decline, and does not achieve results because it overlaps with the particularism of the Law and the Jews’ rejection of foreigners and heathen. “Thus,” says Martin-Achard, “on the level of thought and action alike, the role of mission within the framework of the Old Testament is extremely limited” (*A Light to the Nations*, 7).

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 8. In his view, monotheism leads to universalism, and both of them to the idea of mission.

Because “Deutero”-Isaiah gives Israel hope and comfort and speaks only about deliverance, pardon, restoration, and salvation to a people in exile, Martin-Achard believes that no missionary message is present there since there is no preaching about monotheism or universalism in Isa 40-55. Israel is privileged and treated preferentially, and is supposed to dominate the nations.<sup>67</sup> The “survivors of the nations” are the Jewish exiles in Isa 45:20, “not the Gentiles but the prophet’s coreligionists.”<sup>68</sup> The nations seem to have access to Yahweh only when Israel becomes their mediator. His conclusion is that “the Servant is not charged with bringing the true religion to the heathen; his task is to make known the judgment pronounced by Yahweh on Israel’s behalf.”<sup>69</sup>

Even such terms as *berith* (covenant) or the expression *berith ‘am* (covenant of the people) are taken as “not necessarily implying missionary activity by Yahweh’s Chosen.”<sup>70</sup> The phrase *le’or goyim* is translated as “light of the nations.” However, the author’s interpretation shows that “the shining of the light of the Servant, as seen by Deutero-Isaiah, does not necessarily mean something like the evangelisation of the Hellenistic world in the first century of the Christian era. . . . The Chosen People’s business is to exist. . . . The ultimate destiny of the world depends on the existence of Israel in the midst of the nations.”<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>69</sup> “The nations are not called to conversion by the missionary preaching of the Servant, they are eyewitnesses of the divine judgment that has restored life to Israel” (ibid., 26).

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 27, 28.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 28, 30.

With this perspective in mind, Martin-Achard goes back to the rest of the Old Testament. He declares that “the redemption of mankind begins with the choice of Abraham, and the promise made to him has universal implications.”<sup>72</sup> Before Abraham there is no salvation. Abraham is the instrument for the redemption of the world. However, Gen 12:3 is not considered a missionary text.<sup>73</sup> Even Exod 19:6 is considered to emphasize “the fact that the Israelites are a people apart, rather than the mission that necessarily follows from their election.”<sup>74</sup>

Isaiah 19:23-24 is treated as a post-event process in which Egypt is accepted in the community of the Chosen People, while both Egypt and Assyria are seen as serving Yahweh, with Israel being the link between the two.<sup>75</sup> The book of Jonah is interpreted as a parable, a *midrash*, which is in no way missionary, while Israel is simply reminded not to be an impediment between God and the nations.<sup>76</sup>

The Psalms that talk about the nations are also assigned an earlier writing date. Martin-Achard believes that the “different parts making up the Old Testament evolved on more or less parallel lines. The Pentateuch . . . was shaped by diverse traditions the range of which it is the special business of the specialists to determine. . . . In the tenth century

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<sup>72</sup> “With him [Abraham] Yahweh begins a new chapter in the history of man. . . . Yahweh’s answer to the curse of Babel (Gen 11:1-9) is the call of Abraham” (ibid., 35).

<sup>73</sup> “There is of course no question here of a specific task to be accomplished by Abraham’s descendants on behalf of the heathen” (ibid., 33).

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>75</sup> “The Chosen People does not appear to play any active part in the conversion of Egypt and Assyria” (ibid., 49).

<sup>76</sup> “There is no question here of the conversion of the Ninevites or of a preaching mission devolving on Israel. . . . It does not directly invite the Jews to take definite steps to show the heathen how much God loves them” (ibid., 53).

B.C. the earliest collections of Psalms and probably also of the proverbs took shape.”<sup>77</sup>

Since these Psalms are not written by “Deutero-Isaiah,” they have no missionary meaning. “Yahweh deserves the praise of the whole of creation. . . . It is not only the nations that are to be summoned by the faithful among the Chosen People.”<sup>78</sup>

Martin-Achard concludes that the Old Testament’s “view of history is that its fulfillment is centripetal, not centrifugal.”<sup>79</sup> “The prophet [Isaiah] places the meeting between the God of Israel and the nations in Zion at the end of ages.”<sup>80</sup> Jerusalem will be purified but not destroyed. Isaiah 2:2-4 describes Israel’s duty to the nations: “The multitudes who come up to Jerusalem have to be taught. The priest’s function is to proclaim Yahweh’s *torah*; the prophet’s to mediate His Word.”<sup>81</sup> Martin-Achard parallels Isa 2 and Exod 19, the theophany being now offered to the nations. Israel is supposed to fill Moses’ role as mediator at the end of time. However, the end-time mission is

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<sup>77</sup> Robert Martin-Achard, *An Approach to the Old Testament* [London: Oliver and Boyd, 1965], 6-7).

<sup>78</sup> “No conversion is actually expected of the forest and water; and, by the same token, the Psalmist is not proclaiming that the nations will be radically transformed” (Martin-Achard, *A Light to the Nations*, 58).

<sup>79</sup> “Israel does not have to go seeking the Gentiles, for the Gentiles make haste to the place where Yahweh reveals Himself. . . . Yahweh has made an appointment to meet with mankind not at the end of the earth but in His sanctuary at Jerusalem” (ibid., 61). The author also believes that “in choosing Israel, God chose also a language, a land, and a time: a language which was to be the sacred language, a land which was to become the holy land, and an extent of time which was to constitute sacred history” (Martin-Achard, *An Approach to the Old Testament*, 15).

<sup>80</sup> Martin-Achard, *A Light to the Nations*, 69.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 70. “The ultimate destiny of the Gentiles is determined by the events that take place in the City of God” (ibid., 75).



“reserved for the Church and not entrusted to Israel.”<sup>82</sup> The result of the eschatologic centrifugal movement will be a centripetal attraction of the nations to Jesus, the Messiah.

For Martin-Achard “the difference between the two movements, centripetal and centrifugal, is only relative.”<sup>83</sup> For him, mission is “not a matter of words and deeds: it is a matter of presence.”<sup>84</sup>

### Johannes Blauw

Johannes Blauw’s book, *The Missionary Nature of the Church*, became a basis for espousing the different types of mission in the Old and New Testaments.<sup>85</sup> His work was commissioned by the International Missionary Council and the World Council of Churches, after the Willingen Missionary Conference in 1952. The study was supposed to find a solution to the tension between ecumenical trends and missionary motivation, and to answer the “Why?” of missions.

Blauw is concerned that the theological basis accepted in mission studies “was often quite narrow, and frequently took little or no account of the important trends in academic theological research.”<sup>86</sup> He is not satisfied with the “by-product” position

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 78. “To discover that it is God’s will to gather the whole of mankind together round Him through the mediation of His People means to become aware of the *ecumenical* character of mission” (ibid., 79). Ecumenism is one of the basic assumptions of Martin-Achard’s theology.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Johannes Blauw, *The Missionary Nature of the Church* (Guildford, England: Lutterworth Press, 1962).

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 10. Although Blauw goes to the Old Testament for a mission theology basis, he hardly accepts that there is any mission in the Old Testament.

assigned by theologians to missions, and suggests that Old and New Testament theology reveals more and more a Church which is universal *and* missionary at the same time.

The author claims that the book is a critical survey of different studies on mission during the last thirty years. The result is a “conception of missionary work that is as closely as possible related to what the Bible tells us.”<sup>87</sup> Justifying his starting with the Old Testament (against the practice of his day) he explains that it is Jesus who repeatedly pointed to the Old Testament as his motivation for mission, and “He cannot be understood except in the light of God’s actions in history, the history of salvation.”<sup>88</sup>

Blauw rejects the role frequently assigned to the Old Testament as simply an introduction, and points to the inconsistency of those who read in the Old Testament only Deutero-Isaiah or the book of Jonah, or about a few other non-Israelite characters who accepted Israel’s faith. Blauw suggests that the whole witness of the Testaments should constitute the basis of a theology of mission.<sup>89</sup> He also sets universalism as the point of departure for this theological approach, advising that “we must be much more reserved in

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<sup>87</sup> “Every age needs a fresh encounter with the Bible, because every age has its own questions and problems” (ibid., 12).

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 13. Blauw indicates W. Eichrodt and Von Rad as two of the theologians he prefers to follow in their *Heilsgeschichte* approach (Oscar Cullman’s salvation-history model, followed also by Karl Barth). Blauw assumes a certain continuity between the Testaments, but not identity in regard to mission.

<sup>89</sup> “While the point of departure of the Old Testament is universalistic, *the idea of mission either occurs only sporadically or is missing altogether*. . . . If every declaration of universalism in the Old Testament is called ‘missionary,’ the Isaiah 40-55 and the book of Jonah are indisputably the high points of the Old Testament from a missionary point of view. But if the word ‘missionary’ is confined to the idea of being sent out to the nations with the message of salvation, then these two portions of Scripture become almost the only passages in support of an idea of mission” (ibid., 30).

speaking of the missionary message of the Old Testament than of its universal message.”<sup>90</sup>

Blauw shows that there is more missionary enterprise taking place in the Old Testament than was previously accepted, and recognizes the value of the first eleven chapters in Genesis for the understanding of the Old Testament and the rest of the Bible.<sup>91</sup> The nations are going to be judged for their (dis)obedience towards God against the background of those people’s attitude towards Israel. They share the same origin (God) and final destination (Jerusalem), while God’s law is binding for all.

Election is of particular concern for Blauw, who recognizes that the nations are dependent on Israel for receiving the promised blessings. Following Rowley, Blauw accepts that election is not for privilege but for service.<sup>92</sup> Particularism is a means or an instrument for the universal ends of God with the nations, and “the nations” is having a religious meaning rather than a political or national one. Salvation for the nations is possible only through Israel, by joining the elect people and sharing in their blessings.

Blauw believes that the exile highlights Israel’s special task and place in the world. However, he assigns Israel only a priestly and a judgmental role for the nations,

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<sup>90</sup> Universalism is defined as “having the whole world in view and that it has validity for the whole world,” while missionary means “the deliberate witness, to going out” (ibid., 17).

<sup>91</sup> “The key to the understanding of the whole Scripture is found in Gen 1-11. It is a theology of history. Philosophical terminology and modes of thinking must be dispensed with in order not to lose sight of the true intentions of the narrative” (ibid., 18). Blauw calls Gen 1-11 the “pre-history of Israel as the People of God,” and points out that “*the whole history of Israel is nothing but the continuation of God’s dealings with the nations, and that therefore the history of Israel is only to be understood from the unsolved problem of the relation of God to the nations.*” However, he rejects the idea of evolutionary development or growth in Israel’s religion (ibid., 19, 29).

<sup>92</sup> “It is of great significance that the word *election* and *choice* in the Old Testament, whenever it refers to Israel, is always used in the active, never in the passive form” (ibid., 23).

and adds that “never in the whole period of the Old Testament was there any deliberate missionary activity. . . . During the Old Testament period no one could arrive at mission as an *act* of going out for proclamation among the nations.” The commissions and promises in Deutero-Isaiah and Jonah “will be realized only *in the future*.” Blauw denies any “real plea for mission to the heathen” in the book of Jonah, but “at most it can only be deduced from the book.”<sup>93</sup>

While insisting that the Old Testament is necessary for a theology of mission, Blauw describes mission in the Old Testament as exclusively centripetal. “There is no thought of mission in the Old Testament in the centrifugal sense in which it comes to the fore in the New Testament.”<sup>94</sup> He believes that the only means by which the nations will learn about God “is *not* Israel’s calling them, *nor* her going out to them, but exclusively the visible manifestation of the deeds of God in and with Israel.” Based on the *Heilsgeschichte* approach, the author declares that even “eschatology as expectation of what Yahweh will do really excludes the idea of mission in the narrower sense.”<sup>95</sup>

Analyzing the Servant Songs in Deutero-Isaiah, Blauw states that the nations are not a “mission territory” for the Messianic Servant but a gift or reward he receives at the end.<sup>96</sup> He concludes that the inter-Testamental period must be the time period when Israel

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 27, 34.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 37. “His acts happen *to* Israel, in the sight of the nations, and therefore *to* the nations too. . . . There is no concern in the Old Testament for any human activity for cultivation or acquisition of salvation” (ibid., 38, 52).

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 49. Blauw believes that “the Old Testament as a whole could hardly have known the idea of a personal Messiah” (ibid., 53).

became mission conscious, with Diaspora as its prime mover. Israel's wisdom literature is seen as the bridge between Israel and the nations.

The author indicates that mission is the summons of the Lordship of Christ, while Matt 28:18-20 is "the first time the commission is given to go out to the nations."<sup>97</sup> He believes that in the book of Acts the center is no longer Jerusalem and the Temple but simply the congregation at Jerusalem, with Jesus Christ as the central point around whom the nations will be summoned and invited.<sup>98</sup>

In his last chapter Blauw attempts to sketch a theology of mission. Mission becomes the geographical actualization of the previous eschatological prospects and a theological necessity due to the progression of *Heilsgeschichte*.<sup>99</sup> The "going out to other nations" means going to humans who do not know God, regardless of location.

In conclusion, Blauw states that "a theological reflection of mission service is possible and extremely necessary, but not a 'theology of missions.'" He accepts that such a theology of mission might be developed only "if one misunderstands the Church as well as mission."<sup>100</sup> Any attempt for a theology of mission is seen as "segregation" from the theology of the Old and New Testaments. Blauw is confident that the Church has an

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>98</sup> Blauw's dispensational view requires that "the old nation is Israel at the level of the *old* dispensation; the new nation is also Israel, at the level of the new dispensation. Christians who were Jews are the 'remnants of Israel,' and only by unity with this remnant do the Gentile Christians also belong to Israel" (ibid., 102).

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 121. "Let us not forget that the great prime mover of the preaching of the gospel does not come from outside (the 'need of the world') and not from within either (the 'religious impulse') but from above, as a divine coercion" (ibid., 126).

inherent missionary nature, which makes any discussion about mission theology redundant.<sup>101</sup>

### **The Ecumenical Approach (1961-1974)**

The decisions at Willingen in 1952 led to the formal incorporation of the IMC into the World Council of Churches (WCC) as the Commission of World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) in 1961. From this moment on, the concern of the movement was finding agreement and support for ecumenism besides planning and strategy for mission. The Bible was used for the same reason and the definition and understanding of mission changed significantly. There was a strong emphasis on universalism and the focus was on those who have not heard of Christ. The Old Testament field of study witnessed a diversity of opinions that supported universalism in mission theory.

#### **Andre Rétif and Pierre Lamarche**

Andre Rétif and Pierre Lamarche present a progressive understanding of mission in the Old Testament. They recognize that Yahweh assigned “mission to all men” from the beginning, and that “all families of the world would share in the blessings he conferred on his chosen people.”<sup>102</sup> The authors define God’s people as those who seek to serve God, while the acceptance of the nations is already seen in the first Passover and

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<sup>101</sup> “The unity between Church and mission, the unity, that is, between mission as a service of the Church and the Church as sent into the world, does not mean that there is no longer room for a basic reflection regarding the conditions and manner and extent of the service of the Church to the world. But every separate ‘theology of mission’ will make acute the old danger of the separation of things which God has joined together in His Word. This can be nothing but a source of difficulties and problems” (ibid., 121).

<sup>102</sup> Andre Rétif and Pierre Lamarche, *The Salvation of the Gentiles and the Prophets* (Baltimore, MD: Helicon, 1966), 11.

the Exodus. The tension between nationalism and universalism is recognized in both Testaments.<sup>103</sup>

In the first chapters of Genesis, all families are created from the same “stock,” but for the authors the history of salvation begins only in Gen 12. God loves Israel, but he loves Gentiles, too, and wishes “to see all the families of the earth share in the promises made to Abraham, the father of the faithful.”<sup>104</sup>

Rétif and Lamarche prefer to label the message of Genesis as “universalist.” This “universalist” perspective takes into consideration the common origin of man and its monotheism, in contrast with “universalism” which posits that salvation is provided and available to all.<sup>105</sup> The difference of focus is evident.

The authors introduce the so-called Yahwist tradition as supporting the universalistic idea that all the nations will be blessed and cursed in Adam and Eve, with the promise of redemption made to all descendants of Eve. This universal blessing is found in God’s covenant with Noah, while the table of nations in Gen 10 is interpreted as creating “the unity of mankind so that we should all look on each other as brothers.”<sup>106</sup>

The “Yahwist” sees Abraham as the beginning of God’s process of deliverance. God’s promise for all the nations is repeated seven times, five to him and one to both

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<sup>103</sup> “Universalism is there from the beginning, like a seed only waiting for the chance to grow. . . . Universalism appears in the Old Testament as an aspiration emerging more and more clearly, but incapable of realisation” (ibid., 13).

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>105</sup> Monotheism implies a common origin. Henotheism, the belief that each country had its individual god, encourages particularism. The authors see henotheism in Judg 11:24; 1 Sam 26:19, and 2 Kgs 5:17, much later than Genesis.

<sup>106</sup> Rétif and Lamarche, *The Salvation of the Gentiles and the Prophets*, 20.

Isaac and Jacob.<sup>107</sup> The same view requires that passages which reveal a strong particularism should be read against this universalistic background.<sup>108</sup> The choice of Israel is understood only as part of God's plan to offer salvation to all. The so-called Yahwist seems to accept a Midianite, Reuel, besides Moses, but at the same time rejects any marriage relationship with foreigners.<sup>109</sup>

In contrast, the so-called Elohist and Deuteronomist traditions, although more nationalistic and less universalist, show a great interest in peoples other than Israel.<sup>110</sup> However, they impose a complete separation between Israel and foreigners, while love for one's neighbor is aimed only at the Israelite. Although a kind attitude towards war prisoners is recommended, the Ammonites and Moabites are off limits for Israel.<sup>111</sup> The so-called Priestly tradition seems to emphasize God's covenant with "all flesh." While preserving a universalist framework, the priestly tradition focuses not only on Israel's election but also on Aaron's choice and lineage.

The authors look at Joshua, who, although being merciless toward the Canaanites, spares Rahab and her house who are integrated in Israel and in the Messiah's genealogy. He also spares the Gibeonites, although they use a trick in order to survive.<sup>112</sup> In the book of Judges, Rétif and Lamarche believe that Israel's faith became enriched and better

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<sup>107</sup> With Abraham in Gen 12:3; 13:14; 15:5; 18:18; with Isaac in Gen 22:17-18; 26:4; and with Jacob in Gen 28:14.

<sup>108</sup> Gen 49:10.

<sup>109</sup> Num 10:32.

<sup>110</sup> Rétif and Lamarche, *The Salvation of the Gentiles and the Prophets*, 25.

<sup>111</sup> Deut 23:3; Neh 13:1.

<sup>112</sup> Rétif and Lamarche, *The Salvation of the Gentiles and the Prophets*, 34.



adapted for missionary work. The tendency to copy other nations, in asking for a king and building a Temple, in the books of Samuel is seen as a misguided universalism and a rejection of Yahweh as ruler. But among David's advisers one can find many foreigners.<sup>113</sup> The main preoccupation in the books of Kings is political and economic rather than missionary. The later description of material blessings in the prophets seems to be inspired from this period of wealth coming to Jerusalem. However, Solomon's Temple dedication prayer is considered a combination of both universalism and particularism.

The latter prophets, following in the steps of Elijah and Elisha, shape the missionary understanding of Israel.<sup>114</sup> Although there are many oracles against the nations, "a closer examination will reveal a universalist outlook in setting Israel and the gentiles on equal terms."<sup>115</sup> Amos is seen as prophesying the salvation of Israel at the expense of other nations. Hosea, although talking about God's love for Israel, "prepared men's minds for the blessing of universal redemption."<sup>116</sup>

The passages in Isaiah which talk about salvation offered to all nations, although attributed to other authors or editors, are considered as part of his prophetic school. Isaiah's universalism is "not of a missionary kind," but with a centralizing tendency

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<sup>113</sup> "Normally, the foreigner represented the enemy, yet those who agreed to serve Israel were treated kindly. They neither feared the stranger nor did they accept a universalist outlook, but showed an awareness of their own unique position" (ibid., 39).

<sup>114</sup> "It is through these prophets that God revealed the universal aim of his plans for Israel" (ibid., 46).

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 51.

towards Jerusalem and the law. Isaiah 19 is considered “one of the peaks of the revelation of universalism.”<sup>117</sup>

Micah joins the universalistic view of Isaiah, indicating that the nations will be attracted to Jerusalem by its glory and a messiah-king. Zephaniah warns about the Day of Yahweh in a universalistic way, including both Judah and the nations as recipients of the catastrophe of cosmic dimension. However, he mentions a special promise of salvation for the nations (Zeph 3:9-10). Habakkuk presents a negative universalism with the nations being destroyed so that Israel will be saved. However, “the just man, because of his faith, shall live” (Hab 2:4).

Jeremiah receives a universal mission. He “makes a vigorous attack on the idols of the nations . . . in the name of Yahweh, creator of all and ‘king of the gentiles’ (Jer 10:7-16).”<sup>118</sup> The authors see the New Covenant in Jer 31 as concerning Israel only. However, they recognize that Jeremiah’s teaching goes beyond Israel’s nationalism.<sup>119</sup>

Although Ezekiel is concerned with the moral reform in Israel and relegates the nations to destruction, he speaks about reform in a universalistic way.<sup>120</sup> Regarding the book of Jonah, Rétif and Lamarche claim that “the author of the story . . . wished that Israel would let herself be drawn into a great missionary enterprise to preach conversion

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>119</sup> Jer 18:1-17. “The share allotted to the gentiles in the promises of salvation still seems to be very small” (ibid., 60).

<sup>120</sup> “If Ezekiel appears to turn his back on the idea of a missionary vocation for Israel, it is only to concentrate on the rebuilding of the nation. The people must be restored to their land and their temple before they can think of becoming a light to the nations” (ibid., 64).

to the multitudes whose fate God shows to be his concern. The story is full of humour and contains one of the finest missionary calls in the Old Testament.”<sup>121</sup>

In conclusion, Rétif and Lamarche emphasize the universalism of the Old Testament, noticing that Israel “was not allowed to obscure her common origin with the rest of mankind.”<sup>122</sup> They see only two ways out of the tension between nationalism and religious unity on one hand, and universalism on the other hand: religious syncretism, or intensified religious identity (which will lead to the exclusion of the foreigner). Rétif and Lamarche conclude that universalism remained unfulfilled in the Old Testament.<sup>123</sup>

### **The Post-Lausanne Era (1974-1983)**

After the merging of the IMC with the WCC there was a time of turbulence in missionary circles. Not everybody accepted the ecumenical perspective, and there were strong reactions. Most Evangelicals reacted to the softening of the missionary and evangelistic movement, as well as to the Catholic and Orthodox theology. The Lausanne conference in 1974 became a reference point and a response to the ecumenical movement and its conciliar theology. The emphasis was on returning to the biblical understanding of mission and to the missionary role of the church, as well as to the authoritative role of the Word of God. A similar tendency is noticed in Old Testament theology works where conservative scholars Edward J. Young and J. Barton Payne stressed the need to affirm

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>123</sup> “The texts of the Old Testament have, we hope, shown the universal plan of salvation which God worked out from the beginning of the world. They should have shown how God endeavoured little by little to set free among his own people a real missionary spirit to replace their self-seeking desire for conquest” (ibid., 120).

the unity of God's Word and his revelation, and to check the presuppositions with which his Word is approached.<sup>124</sup> A strong reaction came from Brevard Childs who argued that a true Old Testament theology should take all books of Scripture as canonical and valid, not only history or single themes.<sup>125</sup> Mission theology begins to be recognized as a legitimate theological branch whose representatives for this period are George Peters, Richard De Ridder, Donald Senior, and Carroll Stuhlmueller.

#### George Peters

Writing shortly after the IMC joined the WCC, George Peters seems to react strongly against the ecumenical direction the missionary movement has taken at that time. He is an evangelical, and *A Biblical Theology of Missions* is still quoted today by many conservative missiologists.<sup>126</sup>

From the preface, Peters clarifies his hermeneutical position. He accepts the Bible “uncritically and authoritatively,” not as “a book about theology, as such, but rather, a record of theology in mission,” with Christ as its interpreter.<sup>127</sup> The author believes in the principle of progressive revelation and *Heilsgeschichte*. He rejects any spiritualization of

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<sup>124</sup> Edward J. Young, *The Study of Old Testament Theology Today* (London: James Clark, 1958); J. Barton Payne, *The Theology of the Older Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1962).

<sup>125</sup> Brevard Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1970).

<sup>126</sup> George W. Peters, *A Biblical Theology of Missions* (Chicago: Moody, 1972).

<sup>127</sup> His hermeneutical statement is comprehensive: “The Bible is the basis and source of faith and not the result of faith. I am much concerned to bring everything under the judgment of the Word. Without hesitation I accept the inerrancy of the biblical record, the historicity of the foreword of the Bible—Genesis 1-11, the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, and the historic, conservative and evangelical position of all the books of the Bible” (ibid., 9). There is no room in his approach for a different possibility of interpretation.

Old Testament passages or prophecies, affirming his inerrantism combined with dispensationalism. For him there is no conditional prophecy; everything has to happen exactly as it reads, literally, moving towards a triumphalistic end.<sup>128</sup>

*Mission* is defined as “the total assignment of the church of Jesus Christ. . . . It is the church as ‘sent’ in this world.”<sup>129</sup> *Missions*, instead, is a specialized term, meaning “the sending forth of authorized persons beyond the borders of the New Testament church and her immediate gospel influence to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ in gospel-destitute areas.”<sup>130</sup> After clarifying a number of other terms, he sets out to look for the deepest foundations in missions, its nature, dynamics, means, and goals.

The author recognizes that sin is a reality reported in the whole Bible except in the first two and the last two chapters, while man “was created sinless and for a divinely designated purpose, mission and destiny.”<sup>131</sup> The remedy for sin is the salvation designed by God in and through Jesus Christ. The Bible has a universal character, Peters choosing the term *universality*<sup>132</sup> (comprehensiveness, inclusiveness, all-embracing) rather than *universalism*.<sup>133</sup> He also distinguishes between ideal, practical, and realized universality.

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<sup>128</sup> “God has a marvelous plan and program. History has purpose and meaning. There is a *Heilsgeschichte Gottes* which cannot be frustrated nor can it be defeated” (ibid., 24).

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>130</sup> He quotes Douglas Webster and Georg F. Vicedom: “We begin, then, where mission begins, with God. . . . Mission is ‘Missio Dei’” (ibid., 25).

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>132</sup> He rejects the universalism of revelation because it “denies the Christian theological concept of *Heilsgeschichte* as recorded in the Old Testament in contrast to general or secular world history” (ibid., 19).

<sup>133</sup> “God’s promise and provision of salvation include all mankind and not just an ‘elect remnant’” (ibid., 20).

Peters invites his readers to distinguish between universality and mission. Since mission is “sending,” universality, especially as presented in the Old Testament, is not sending. He follows Blauw and rejects centrifugal mission in the Old Testament, claiming that “nowhere in the Old Testament was Israel ‘sent’ to the nations. . . . In regard to methodology, the Scriptures prescribe a twofold way—the *centrifugal* and the *centripetal*. It must be recognized that the Old Testament is wholly built around the latter method whereas the New Testament enjoins the former method.”<sup>134</sup>

The author describes the centripetal way as “sacred magnetism that draws to itself,” and exemplifies it with the Queen of Sheba and the Ethiopian eunuch. At Pentecost the methodology changed but not the principle and purpose. Peters divides the history of the world into four phases: Gen 1-11, which relates to the whole human race; the second phase in which Israel is supposed to be a mediator between God and the nations;<sup>135</sup> the third phase when Israel is set aside and the Church takes the stage; and the fourth phase during the millennium when Israel would supposedly be restored nationally and spiritually and lead the nations to serve the Lord. The author considers that there is “no real gospel message—good news—for the Gentiles before the cross and resurrection of Christ.” However, he emphasizes that “universality can be either centrifugal or centripetal,” because Christ found in the Old Testament “not only His major theological concepts but also the scope of God’s redemptive plan.”<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 21. He later states that “Jesus Christ constantly related Himself, His message and His mission to the Old Testament. He did not contradict or destroy but modified, enriched, expanded, and in many ways transformed and glorified the Old Testament” (ibid., 83).

<sup>135</sup> “It was the responsibility of the nations to inquire and seek God” (ibid., 23).

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 52.

Speaking of God, Peters emphasizes the Trinitarian nature of mission and the missionary nature of God. He indicates that salvation actually began when God visited Adam and Eve, uninvited, after the Fall. Peters recognizes the same principle in the way God later dealt with Abraham and Israel in Egypt. “The initiative lay with God.”<sup>137</sup> It is unmerited, pure grace which can be received only by faith and has a cosmic dimension.

Peters divides the Scripture in three sections: Gen 1-11, or the *protevangelium* (belongs to all mankind); Gen 12 to the end of the Old Testament (Israel’s dispensation); and the New Testament (the church’s dispensation), corresponding to the racial, national, and ecclesiological revelation.

The author pays little attention to the first two chapters in Genesis, but moves to Gen 3:15 (which he calls “the *protevangelium*”), a promise made to the entire human race. He also recognizes the universality of the Noachian covenant and indicates that at Babel “the divine principle of separation and division had to be introduced to counteract the ungodly confederation of humankind.”<sup>138</sup> Genesis 3-11 represents the history of sin, but also God’s intervention and judgment on sin. The Babel moment is “the culmination of sin” because people rebel openly against God and try to glorify themselves.

The particularism of the call of Abraham in Gen 12 is seen as a radical change in God’s methodology but not in design and purpose. “It is a new ray of hope for the world.”<sup>139</sup> This call is a supernatural act and revelation of God, the beginning of

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>138</sup> Distinction “is the soteriological leitmotif (dominant, unifying, all-inclusive thrust and intent) and hermeneutical principle governing Old Testament interpretation” (ibid., 86).

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 90. “A change in methodology does not change His goal” (ibid., 89).

*Heilsgeschichte* (salvation story).<sup>140</sup> Against this background, Israel is called to be a mediator. However, Peters acknowledges that there is a gap between the revelational idealism exposed by the Old Testament and the actual life of Israel. In spite of their weakness, God binds himself to Israel by several covenants, which constitute the source of moral and religious strength of their national religion.

In the Old Testament God can be known through his names “which certainly have a qualitative meaning.”<sup>141</sup> It is no wonder that the prophets focused on God, reminding Israel of God’s names and correcting mistaken notions and views about God’s nature. Monotheism has not developed progressively but was revealed to Israel. However, he is not the God of Israel only, and his people are not the only ones who enjoy his presence. As the God of the nations, he does not have any problem in sending Jonah to Nineveh.

Solomon’s prayer and the Psalms mention the foreigner or the nations coming to Jerusalem or the Temple to worship. Peters claims this was anticipation, not a reality of the moment.<sup>142</sup> However, the prophets join Solomon, their more or less explicit universalism climaxing in the second section of Isaiah, because of its messianism and absolute monotheism.<sup>143</sup> The author considers that the primary application of the Servant songs has to be made to Israel who is sent to offer salvation on equal terms to all nations.

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<sup>140</sup> “Secular and sacred history are taking on separate courses. The history of Israel is distinct because God is watching over it and enriching it in many ways, especially with His own self-disclosures. In the history of Israel, God is uniquely present, distinguishing it not only quantitatively but qualitatively from the general flow of history” (ibid., 93-94).

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>142</sup> “The Holy Spirit directed him to include the stranger in his prayer and to point out the missionary significance of the temple. The temple was God’s monument of His relationship to the earth and of the accessibility to God by all nations” (ibid., 117).

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 123.



Peters concludes that “the Old Testament does not contain mission; it is itself ‘missions’ in the world.” He claims that the “New Testament is the normative interpretation of the Old Testament while at the same time it abrogates and modifies many practices, and transforms, enlarges and completes the revelation of God.”<sup>144</sup>

Richard De Ridder

In *Discipling the Nations*, Richard De Ridder begins with the premise that Christian mission did not arise in a vacuum.<sup>145</sup> He argues that New Testament mission is a fulfillment of missionary activity in the Old Testament and the intertestamental period. Christianity’s mission was shaped and empowered by its Jewish antecedents.<sup>146</sup>

Concerned with the purpose of God for the Gentiles, the author believes that the Old Testament contains the answer to this question. Recognizing God’s presence in the Old Testament he tries to find out its meaning in relation to human activity.<sup>147</sup> At the same time he notices that “the social conditions under which the chosen (elect) community of Israel lived are also important for an understanding of the background of the nature of *missio Dei*.”<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 129, 130.

<sup>145</sup> “No student of missions can long escape the necessity of examining the Old Testament antecedents to the Christian mission” (Richard De Ridder, *Discipling the Nations* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1975], 2).

<sup>146</sup> “Pre-Christian proselyting is significant in its own right and its importance goes beyond preparation for the Christian fulfillment. The pre-Christian movements were concerned with no less a matter than the salvation or judgment of those who received the witness, Jew or non-Jew” (ibid., 4).

<sup>147</sup> “It is the divine, not the human, activity that stands in the foreground in the Old Testament” (ibid., 9).

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

The Jewish Diaspora played an important missionary role among the nations they had to live with. De Ridder reminds us that “when God chose and elected a man or a people, this meant dispersion, a giving up of home and land.”<sup>149</sup>

The Old Testament is seen as a unity in growth and development. “Each stage of the development has its own uniqueness and must be considered in the light of the whole.”<sup>150</sup> Before any nation was elected, the Creation of humanity took place (Gen 1-11). He links the concept of Creation in the Scripture with God’s sovereignty. God is concerned with the human race in its totality, and elects a nation only to fulfill his purposes.<sup>151</sup> The creator God is not only Israel’s God. De Ridder points out that Israel is not even mentioned in the table of nations in Gen 11, and so it is not the focal point of the nations. “God called Israel into His service for the service of the nations.”<sup>152</sup>

God’s covenant with Abraham is for De Ridder a universal covenant because Abraham is considered the instrument for the redemption of the whole world. He was not born an Israelite, and the covenant is under no sanctions, based solely on God’s grace.

Although the author does not see any clear general missionary command in the Old Testament as in the New Testament, the covenant with Abraham reveals the fact that

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 11. “Abraham, e.g., lived in the promised land ‘as in a foreign land’ (Heb 11:8-10). The people of Israel were never permitted to ignore the fact that the Promised Land was given by God’s redemptive act of deliverance from Egypt’s bondage (Ex. 20:2).”

<sup>150</sup> “The revelation of Scripture is not to be thought as being static. . . . Social history in the Old Testament is interpreted religiously, i.e., in terms of the activity of God” (ibid., 15).

<sup>151</sup> “Man has been created by God, is dependent on him, is answerable to him in rebellion against him, but at the same time is the object of God’s redemptive, seeking love. History in the Bible is the record of God’s redemptive activity for the sake of humanity” (ibid., 22).

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 18.

God has a purpose for all nations, which he is working out through his chosen.<sup>153</sup>

Scripture does not describe how long the knowledge and worship of the true God continued among other peoples, because Scripture seems to be primarily concerned with revealing to us how God worked out his plan through an elect, covenant people.<sup>154</sup>

De Ridder notes that non-Israelites would always live in the midst of Israel, in their land, and God's commandments included them. They were to be treated as guests, and the law applied without discrimination both to Israelite and Gentile.

The author believes that the Jews made far-reaching, significant, and effective attempts to win others to their faith. Although he cannot find a "direct, unmistakably clear divine commission calling to a mission of consciously going to the Gentiles to win them for God, this does not mean that the Old Testament is indifferent to such activity."<sup>155</sup> Israel was to be for the nations what the prophets were for Israel. As God of the nations, God would address the nations through Israel. The belief that the true religion must in the end be universal was enough to make Israel a missionary people and Judaism a missionary religion.

For most of its history, the majority of Israel lived in the Diaspora. God commanded them to multiply and become established in their new lands. Hints, here and

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<sup>153</sup> "In this early covenant for the nations the essential features basic to the missionary task are to be found. . . . This rite [circumcision] was intended to mean the incorporation of the person into a special relationship with God. . . . The children at one and the same time belong to the man circumcised but also to the God of the covenant" (ibid., 26, 29).

<sup>154</sup> "Any reading of the Old Testament . . . which neglects God's purpose for the nations and insists that God was interested only in Israel is a misreading of the divine revelation. . . . Election is also the link that inseparably binds Old and New Testament together: God has his people. . . . Neither Israel, nor the Gentile believer should ever forget that they are saved by the one universal, redemptive covenant" (ibid., 34, 35).

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 50-51.

there, denote the fact that the Jews living among the nations had to adapt, and adapt their missionary style to the local situation, this time by proselytizing. Although considered a punishment, this scattering of Israel was an opportunity to practice their mission.

Wherever they went, Jews built synagogues as a mean of preserving their identity and to carry out their mission. These synagogues became well known in the foreign cities and countries, and very influential. Later, Christianity developed around the same synagogues, these special places ensuring the transition from Jewish-based mission to a wider-based mission.<sup>156</sup>

De Ridder concludes that “whatever character of the mission Israel carried on, her goal and purpose had to be the glory of God. . . .This was not merely preparatory for the Christian mission but was a legitimate mission in its own right, an appeal of God through Israel to the nations.”<sup>157</sup>

#### Donald Senior and Carroll Stuhlmueller

Donald Senior and Carroll Stuhlmueller write from the Catholic tradition. Although stating from the beginning that “the explicit mandate to bring the message of salvation to the ‘end of the earth’ is, of course, found only in the New Testament,” the authors inform the reader that “the roots of the church’s mission go deeper, even beyond the history of Jesus and the early church.”<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> De Ridder considers that the Jews in the Diaspora were more inclined toward inclusivism than the exclusive people in Jerusalem.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>158</sup> Senior and Stuhlmueller, *The Biblical Foundations of Mission*, 2. Their volume is divided with Stuhlmueller writing the Old Testament section, and Senior the New Testament one. Since Stuhlmueller writes the Old Testament section of the book, I will refer to him as author when quoting from this section.

Senior and StuhlmueLLer announce that “one of the basic principles of this study is that the biblical foundations for mission span the entirety of God’s Word.” They conclude that “the mission question is intrinsic to the Bible,” and define mission as “more than ‘making converts.’ . . . Mission is God’s given call to appreciate and share one’s religious experience and insights, first within one’s own community and tradition, and then with people and communities of other cultural, social, and religious traditions.”<sup>159</sup>

Senior and StuhlmueLLer believe that a universal mission was not part of Israel’s consciousness, but identify a centripetal momentum that starts in the patriarchal tradition and is strengthened during the Exodus. As a result, “Israel never felt the need to include the salvation of the nonelect within a theological synthesis of its major doctrines.”<sup>160</sup>

Writing about the Old Testament, StuhlmueLLer cannot find any correlation between exclusivist passages such as Deut 7:12, 6-8 and the idea of mission.<sup>161</sup> However, he has to admit that “here as so often in the Hebrew Scriptures, a careful reader will detect signals or flashes of a contrary movement. An opposite, or centrifugal, radiation away from Israel toward the Gentile nations is stirring beneath the surface.”<sup>162</sup> He notices that in the story of the Exodus one finds both a centripetal liberation and secular celebration, and a centrifugal liturgical celebration.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 16. StuhlmueLLer notices even in the patriarchal period “a double movement, of absorption and of rejection” (ibid., 17).

The author searches for a methodology for reading the Old Testament in the context of the world mission of the church, as found in the New Testament. He also accepts the Documentary Hypothesis and believes that some books of the Bible (i.e., Isaiah) have more than one author. Second Isaiah offers glimpses of universal salvation, while its authors are supposed to be “an open-minded yet agonizing group of people responsible for chapters 56-66 in Isaiah as well as for books like Jonah and Ruth.”<sup>164</sup>

The author recognizes the missionary zeal of the Pharisees, enhanced by the Diaspora Jews living in Asia Minor and northern Africa, and notes that the outward (centrifugal) movement to the Gentile world was sometimes caused by economic or political reasons and carried on by lay people, not by priests or Levites.

StuhlmueLLer assigns the first eleven chapters in Genesis to a late period of Israelite history. Thus he places Salvation before Creation.<sup>165</sup> He also seems to prefer that Creation be kept distinct from salvation.

Reflecting on Isa 55:6-11, StuhlmueLLer concludes that God’s will and plan, made before Earth’s creation, are revealed gradually. Such a view places the whole salvation concept in a cosmic perspective. The perspective includes cosmic war and violence in which God fights against Israel using the nations to shape Israel’s religious history. He also fights against demons (Dan 7-12). Violence can hardly be accepted as mission, but StuhlmueLLer shows that it is weaved in the Old Testament’s structure. “Violence ought to be considered a charism or gift put to the service of God’s people and God’s providential

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>165</sup> “These chapters of Genesis are best interpreted as a theological commentary upon God’s way of saving his people, Israel” (ibid., 36).

plan, just as truly as any other quality, like pacifism or prayer.”<sup>166</sup> Because of this understanding of violence, the concept of election takes a negative turn requiring a firm and total rejection of foreigners, who are responsible for Israel’s moral corruption. “Deuteronomy sanctions the *herem* or extermination warfare against outsiders.”<sup>167</sup>

Isaiah 10:5 reveals a different view of the nations than the previous books. They are no longer hostile forces to be conquered or forced to worship YHWH, but “the nations are explicitly chosen by Yahweh to punish and purify his people, to reduce Israel to a remnant that will return humbly to the Lord, chastened and renewed.”<sup>168</sup> Since the nations are mandated by God with a mission, the concept of Israel’s election raises serious problems for mission theology. If Israel is defined as a chosen nation, there should be a definition for the rest of the nations, too.

The geographical element plays an important role for the discussion of election, because mission “sends people to every part and corner of the earth and cannot be limited to any single piece of property or tied to any individual culture or history.”<sup>169</sup> Stuhlmueeller considers that land was both a blessing and a curse. Although Israel was promised land, it was supposed to live with a desert mentality, moving always onward. The covenant implied sharing the blessings, not rights and privileges.

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 43. “Violence cannot be dismissed or excised from the Old Testament without mutilating the basic structure of the Scriptures, or at least without seriously interrupting the development of thought or action in key books” (ibid.).

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 77. “No longer, as in the earlier traditions found in the books of Joshua and Judges, are the nations simply hostile forces that stand in Israel’s way and are to be conquered. Nor are the nations, as in the ‘colonial’ days of David and Solomon, to be absorbed militarily into the kingdom of Judah and Israel, and forced to worship Yahweh (2 Sam 8; Ps 87)” (ibid.).

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 84.

The author traces back the principle of election as far as the beginning of the book of Genesis.<sup>170</sup> However, he insists that election worked as an instrument to reduce “Israel to the very condition necessary in God’s eyes for election and covenant: a helpless, enslaved people. This conditional nature of the election—a threat to lose one’s possessions if they were ever held with pride and sensuality—led to that absolute condition of helplessness that assured divine compassion and choice.”<sup>171</sup>

StuhlmueLLer indicates that in the Old Testament the nations are judged according to their attitude toward Israel. From the patriarchs’ friendly attitude toward the *ger*, through David’s conquest of the Moabites, to the hostility and hatred against the nations conquering Israel, and ending with separatism, suspicion, or anger in exile, a very complex relationship existed between Israel and the nations. However, the author does not accept the conversion terms of Isa 45:14, while presupposing that Ps 117 is an exaggeration. He believes such biblical writers refer rather to “crypto-Israelites who were still believers at heart but had adopted Gentile patterns externally (Is 42:1).”<sup>172</sup>

The author believes that the Second Isaiah did not invent or create a new doctrine of universalism but rediscovered one that was obscured. Earlier examples of universalism are Pss 29, 87, 89, the book of Amos (4:13; 9:7), and even Gen 1-3 and Gen 10.<sup>173</sup> He

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<sup>170</sup> “Even in Israel’s prehistory, as recounted in Gen 1-11, a process of differentiation and separation was continuously at work: God chose Abel and then Seth instead of Cain (Gen 4:4, 25-26), Shem instead of Noah’s other sons, Ham and Japhet (Gen 9:25-27), Abram instead of Nahor, Haran, and Lot (Gen 11:27). This prolonged way of singling one person out of many others is summarized in Gen 12:1-3” (ibid., 84).

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 100. These passages are believed to have been added to the Old Testament at a later date.



claims that “Second Isaiah did not announce the conversion of the Gentiles to Yahweh, only their admiration for the way that Yahweh was bringing his elect people out of their midst. . . . *All* flesh did not see Israel’s return. . . . If *some* outsiders can be converted, then the way is open for a world mission to ‘all flesh.’”<sup>174</sup>

In conclusion, the authors recognize that the nations are part of the Old Testament picture, being God’s final goal. The balance between Israel and the nations must be maintained in order to be true to the Old Testament canon. Senior and Stuhlmuehler admit that the Old Testament presents both centripetal and centrifugal missionary forces, which must be kept in balance.<sup>175</sup>

### **Modern Mission Theology Attempts (1983-1999)**

Faced with the open tension between ecumenical theology and the Evangelical movement, and with a *de facto* change of role in the missionary fields, theologians returned to the Bible for a reassessment of mission. The realization that the West is in need of evangelization and mission, too, caused them to look for new meanings for mission. The search sought to define the limits of mission since all kinds of agendas claimed legitimacy as mission. Old Testament theology continued the trend towards the unity and canonicity of Scripture, with Walther Zimmerli focusing on the importance of Israel’s monotheism, as well as the need to let the Old Testament itself establish the

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> “Thus a scan of Jewish history in the Old Testament reveals a dialectic between centripetal and centrifugal forces, between flight from the secular and absorption of the secular, between a concern for self-identity and responsible interaction with one’s environment, between elect status as God’s chosen people and humble awareness of one’s solidarity with the entire human family” (ibid., 315-316).

theological agenda and conclusions.<sup>176</sup> This view was reflected in mission theologies that emphasized an Old Testament mission model of its own, but also in those that asked for a continuity of faith and mission in spite of the changes Israel went through and the tensions in its history. Another important voice that will later link Old Testament theology to its mission counterpart is Walter C. Kaiser Jr. who writes *Toward an Old Testament Theology* particularly emphasizing the unity of Scripture and the need to let the canon speak for itself. Kaiser proposes as a theological center the promise-fulfillment model that allows Old Testament mission to continue in the New Testament.<sup>177</sup> On the other hand, Elmer Martens uses a combined synchronic-diachronic model that focuses on God's fourfold "design" to be found in each major period.<sup>178</sup> Mission is reflected primarily in the experience with God, but also found in the other three components.

#### Francis DuBose

Francis DuBose, an Evangelical, sets out to rediscover the concept of sending in the Bible. In the first part of *God Who Sends*, he shows how sending is present in the Old Testament both as event and as idea.<sup>179</sup> Then he notes that the more explicit centrifugal aspect of the New Testament is only a continuation and development of what already appears in the Old.

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<sup>176</sup> Walther Zimmerli, *Old Testament Theology in Outline* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox, 1978).

<sup>177</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1978).

<sup>178</sup> Elmer Martens, *God's Design: A Focus on Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1981). The components are: deliverance, community, experience with God, and land.

<sup>179</sup> DuBose, *God Who Sends: A Fresh Quest for Biblical Mission*, 41-52.

In the Preface, DuBose acknowledges that the reason for writing the book was “a lack of clear biblical definition of mission.” He has chosen the topic “because God as Sender is the basis of all the Bible has to say on the subject.”<sup>180</sup>

DuBose blames the lack of a solid and consistent hermeneutic for the linguistic confusion about the term *mission*.<sup>181</sup> Browsing through different approaches, from the idea of “sending” and “universalism,” to salvation, evangelism, service, dialogue with those of other faiths, and even the liberation movements, the author notices that local contexts define mission, although the Scriptures are used extensively.<sup>182</sup>

DuBose illustrates his case with authors that “assume ‘the universal’ as the missionary motif of Scripture without demonstrating this hermeneutically.”<sup>183</sup> He argues that most authors approach the biblical text looking in fact for biblical justification and support for their *a priori* idea. His concern is that we begin with “a Western-oriented institutional mission methodology which seeks to speak for the rest of the world—a strangely ‘un-universal’ universality.”<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>181</sup> “Theological studies . . . have not established clear principles of interpretation in arriving at their concepts. . . . Despite the rich insights these mission studies bring to our understanding of mission, most seem to leave us with either only an implied or poorly defined or even sometimes a confused concept. The result has been the lack of a conceptually clear theological understanding of mission from a biblical perspective” (ibid., 15, 16).

<sup>182</sup> “Most theological persuasions have tended to use the proof-text method, however, rather than first speak from clear guidelines as to how they are using the Scripture” (ibid., 22).

<sup>183</sup> He quotes Julian Price Love, *The Missionary Message of the Bible* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1941); Ferdinand Hahn, *Mission in the New Testament*, Studies in Biblical Theology, No. 47 (Naperville, IL: A. R. Allenson, 1965); Johannes Blauw, *The Missionary Nature of the Church*; and George W. Peters, *A Biblical Theology of Missions*.

<sup>184</sup> DuBose, *God Who Sends*, 23.

The author proposes to start not with an assumption but with a consensus: *mission means sending*. DuBose suggests that “sending” is more than a descriptive word containing a biblical idea of mission.<sup>185</sup> Some writers equate mission with universality in the Bible, but he contends the two are not synonymous, although they are found in both Testaments. Noting the scarcity of the material, the author begins a meticulous analysis of the language and literary forms in which the concept of *sending* appears.<sup>186</sup> He identifies three intrinsic components: (1) an intelligent sending “source,” (2) a sending “medium,” and (3) a sending “purpose.” Next, DuBose analyzes the *sending* as “event” (in narrative passages) and “idea” (in all other literature types). Finally, he shows how the Bible expresses *sending* as “interpretation” and “declaration.”<sup>187</sup>

Based on the previous analysis, the author surveys the theological sending passages. He introduces Gen 3:23 as the first sending passage, when Adam and Eve are sent out of Eden, and notes that most of the Old Testament passages “refer to God’s providential, judgmental, and saving work, with some references carrying a sense which combines the providential and salvific meanings in the context of events describing the larger redemptive purposes of God.”<sup>188</sup> The sending of Joseph is seen as a prototype of the later sending of Moses and Aaron (and implicitly the Exodus).

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<sup>185</sup> For DuBose “mission and sending have essentially the same meaning” (ibid., 24).

<sup>186</sup> “We seem to say it best with *mission*, and the Bible seems to say it best with the “sending” (ibid., 36. See also the exegesis and analysis, 30-37).

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., 38. “In the final analysis, sending as event and idea are always related, for there is little or no ideological abstraction in the Bible” (ibid., 40).

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., 41.

DuBose shows that the salvific sending of Israel out of Egypt was matched by the judgment and sending of plagues over Egypt, while Deuteronomy recapitulates all the instances in which God sent Moses with a mission. The rest of the Old Testament (the historical, poetical, and prophetic books) is replete with the message of sending, the survey ending with “God sending the surviving remnant to be his witness to many peoples, to declare his glory among the nations,” and with the special messenger sent to prepare the way for Messiah.<sup>189</sup>

The author differentiates between the “naked” and the contextualized language of sending as well as its explicit and implicit aspects, showing that the concept of the sending is “inherent . . . in the biblical understanding of knowledge.”<sup>190</sup> Since the concept has a special theological significance, DuBose recommends that *sending* should be seen as a technical theological term, similar to other technical terms like *covenant*, *kingdom*, *grace*, *faith*, *salvation*, and *judgment*.<sup>191</sup>

DuBose encourages the reader to look for the “go” commands in the Old Testament for they represent “the imperative mood of the missional idea.”<sup>192</sup> He understands God’s initiative to look for Adam in Gen 3 as self-sending with a clear purpose. “*The proto-missio* (the ‘original mission’) precedes the *proto-evangelium* (the

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 48-49.

<sup>190</sup> “This language of sending is necessary to convey explicitly the theological ideas which are inherent in the biblical message” (ibid., 54, 72).

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>192</sup> Genesis 12:1-3 is considered “the primitive missional vision expressed in covenantal terms,” while in the prophets “the idea of going and the idea of sending are linked.” The same is identified in Jesus’ commissioning of the disciples (ibid., 55-57).

‘original gospel’) of Gen 3:15. What flowers ultimately in all Scripture has its roots in this primal mission and the purpose behind it.”<sup>193</sup>

The author recognizes that the sending is the divine *modus operandi* expressed in the three roles that God fulfills as sender: Creator (providence), Judge (correction), and Savior (redemption). As Creator, God’s presence in the world is completely benevolent. It comes “out of his sovereign pleasure of his will for his world and his children.”<sup>194</sup>

As Judge, God sends angels to defeat the Assyrian army, but also sends Syria and other people against the unrepentant Israel. As Savior, God’s actions are clearly seen in the Exodus event. His ultimate sending is a salvific one. The object of the sending is humanity (supposed to share the mission), while sending takes place in the world.

Studying the mission as meaning, DuBose deals with epistemology (transcendence and immanence), ontology (knowing God through experience), ethics (relationships: divine-human, interpersonal, societal), and esthetics (the beauty of God, form, function, purpose, missional vision and task). He points out that “the method behind the recovery of the *imago Dei* is the *missio Dei*—the incipient sending of Genesis and the ultimate sending of the New Covenant.”<sup>195</sup> The Bible is considered the result of mission, having the role “to tell the story of the God who sends.”<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>194</sup> “The sending not only reflects the nature of God and reveals the purposes of God but also demonstrates the method of God” (ibid., 61).

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 80. “The idea of mission which derives from the biblical concept of the sending is an exceedingly rich theological concept with a powerful potential” (ibid., 147).

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 148.

Looking at the relationship between mission and theology, DuBose considers that the *sending* plays a key role in harmonizing missiological and theological studies. He believes that what is “needed is not so much a theology of mission but a missional theology. . . . Mission does not so much need to be justified theologically as theology needs to be understood missiologically.”<sup>197</sup>

The author shows how the *sending* unites the thought of each Testament, and brings them together. He contends that social concerns are centripetal and states that social biblical concerns are conveyed through the language of sending.

Referring to the centrifugal-centripetal model applied to mission, DuBose considers that it may have some value, but “it misses the vast and rich world of the sending in the Old Testament and fails fundamentally in understanding the essential oneness of the purpose and method of God in both Testaments, as revealed by the concept of sending.”<sup>198</sup> DuBose concludes that mission as sending is an all-embracing concept that undergirds the Scripture in a life-transforming dynamic.

#### Lucien Legrand

One of the largely unnoticed works on mission in the Bible is Lucien Legrand’s *Unity and Plurality*.<sup>199</sup> He writes from the Catholic tradition and builds his understanding

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<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 149. “The growing feeling is that we need to return to the more primal relation of mission and theology in the sense of their meaning in Scripture” (ibid.).

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 150.

<sup>199</sup> Lucien Legrand, *Unity and Plurality: Mission in the Bible* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1990).

of mission on the concept of God as a missionary God.<sup>200</sup> Concerned that the mission theology of his day restricts mission to a narrow definition, Legrand states that “mission is not a limited, specialized activity. It has as many faces as the dynamism of a church ‘on the move’ in the world and in history.”<sup>201</sup> He defines mission as “sending,” assuring the reader that “the word ‘mission’ can boast a respectable biblical pedigree.”<sup>202</sup> However, he warns the reader not to jump to conclusions too quickly because “the reading of a text is always made through a predetermined grid. One finds only what one seeks.”<sup>203</sup> He proposes that listening first to the whole Bible is a prerequisite to any conclusion on mission theology.<sup>204</sup>

The author asks one of the most important questions in studying mission in the Old Testament: What should be the point of departure—Exodus, Abraham, or Creation? Legrand chooses Abraham as the missionary prototype, rather than Moses.<sup>205</sup> However, based on the Documentary Hypothesis, he considers the Exodus (and Moses) as a

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<sup>200</sup> “The ultimate theological foundation of mission is this movement of God towards creation. *Mission is first and foremost the God who comes*” (ibid., 152).

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., xiii.

<sup>202</sup> “An alternative to the words ‘mission’ and ‘missionary’ could be ‘apostolate’ and ‘apostle’” (ibid., xiv).

<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>204</sup> “We must not impatiently seize upon what is of special interest to ourselves, . . . and not simply impose our own questions from the outset. . . . As Christians reading the Bible on the subject of mission, how we should love to begin with Jesus’ missionary mandate, ‘Go, make disciple of all nations . . .’ (Matt 28:19)! But we must calm our impatience. We must begin at the beginning. We must take account of the Old Testament, in spite of its apparently limited missionary perspectives. We may actually discover new perspectives there” (ibid., 1).

<sup>205</sup> “We might say that, from the very outset, the Bible is concerned to put us on our guard against too triumphalistic a conception of the divine promises. The people promised to Abraham is not defined by a flood of milk and honey alone. It is defined by a faith, as well” (ibid., 3).



foundational experience, while the earlier patriarchal traditions are gradually integrated. Creation is described as having the “universal dimensions of a divine plan that embraces all humanity and all creation.”<sup>206</sup>

Legrand shows that before Abraham, the Exodus, and even before Creation “there is God. The sapiential literature will focus on this mystery of a fundamental mission already residing in God and will name Wisdom as the archetype of all divine action and mission.”<sup>207</sup> The author proposes that all valid points of departure should be considered together as complementary facets of the same mission of God. He warns against reading the Scripture from a narrow viewpoint and “against any monopolistic conception of such a theology” leading to serious implications on mission.<sup>208</sup>

However, the author interprets the texts inviting the nations to turn to the Lord as simply an invitation to share in the privileges of Israel. He suggests a system of twin poles for Israel’s mission: Election and the nations. For example, Legrand rejects using texts from the time of exile and the return of the remnant to Jerusalem for supporting universalism.<sup>209</sup> The term “particularism” is considered inadequate for an Old Testament overwhelmingly universalist. God is described not as the one intervening in the Exodus,

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<sup>206</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid., 5. See Prov 8:22-26; Sir 24:3-22. “In the last analysis, it is this eternal reality of the Word in God that constitutes the force and ultimate content of mission. The words of the gospel proclaimed to the nations are but the echo of the Word pronounced by God from all eternity” (ibid.).

<sup>208</sup> “Readers with blinders on, who prioritize one text over others, besides dangerously impoverishing the biblical message, will readily incline to exclusivism or fanaticism. . . . The danger lurking in any of these positions is in the ‘only’ they contain” (ibid., 6, 7).

<sup>209</sup> “These extreme situations do not furnish us with a suitable point of departure for a reconstruction of Israel’s attitude toward the nations” (ibid., 10).

but as the One who takes care of the whole earth and created nature. Legrand proposes that universalism and election be kept together as complementary poles of God's plan.<sup>210</sup>

Legrand notices that nearly all prophets address foreign peoples in what he terms "aggressive" universalism. "The prophetic texts *upon* the nations are not necessarily oracles *against* the nations."<sup>211</sup> The nations receive a preferential treatment, as well as their share of warnings and woes. Israel is not spared either and is called to adopt the same universalism of "human interest, founded on faith in the universal God."<sup>212</sup>

The author believes that Israel's election by God was not supposed to cut Israel off from the nations but to bring them into a "universalistic dynamic" relationship with the nations as reflected in the Psalms and Isaiah.<sup>213</sup> The Psalms of the Reign (Pss 47, 93, 97, 98, 99) invite the nations to join Israel in praising the universal sovereign God in the context of the Temple rituals and celebrations. The movement is seen as centripetal and there is no call to conversion, the universalism being cultic. On the other hand, the Psalms of Zion (Pss 46, 48, 76, 84, 87, 122, 132, 134, 135) open up the Temple to the nations. Legrand believes that "the psalms of Zion and the psalms of the reign of God represent, in complementarity, the two poles of God's plan: Zion and the nations."<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> "The twin poles of election and mission, separation from the world and a sending to the world, constitute the systolic and the diastolic rhythm of a divine call" (ibid., 26).

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>213</sup> Legrand seems to espouse a very optimistic view of Israel's reaction to the nations. "From the moment of Israel's first contact with the nations, the chosen people instinctively comprehend that their faith, their God, their election concern the nations, too" (ibid., 15).

<sup>214</sup> "There is no talk of election without a surmise of its extension to all peoples" (ibid., 18).

The universalism of the so-called Second Isaiah is called the “universalism of salvation.” Israel is a minority in exile among other strong nations worshipping other gods. Legrand rejects the idea that the Servant is a centrifugal missionary. “The Servant is the light of the nations, yes, not by becoming Yahweh’s propagandist beyond the seas, but by manifesting the divine power that has delivered his people.”<sup>215</sup> This power is restricted to Israel (by divine election) and only through them to other peoples. Conversion is described as “a turning to Jerusalem.”<sup>216</sup> In the end, Legrand identifies a slightly decentralized universalism in Isa 19 and Mal 1, as well as in the book of Jonah. But this universalism is rather God’s universal love.

The author suggests that in the Old Testament we are faced with many universalisms (sapiential, of divine power, of justice, of gathering, of sin, and of divine love and salvation) that do not fit a single evolutive line. “The only thing they have in common is faith in God as the universal Lord of all the earth.”<sup>217</sup> An evolutive perspective, with the Old Testament only as a preparatory period for the New Testament, has led almost entirely to negligence of the Old Testament. A unilinear evolutive model requires a single point of arrival, usually imposed by the New Testament reading.<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> “In this book, mission is not a campaign to convert the pagans. . . . The ‘light of the nations’ is not a teaching transmitted by human missionaries. It is the power of God manifested to the entire world through Israel” (ibid., 19, 20).

<sup>216</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>218</sup> “Mission is reduced to the explicit proclamation of the gospel to the pagans. . . . This sort of impoverished view of the text of scripture has led a certain American manual of the biblical theology of mission [Peters] to sum it all up in a diagram labeling the Old Testament ‘Come!’ and the New, more generously, ‘Go!’ Actually, the mission of Israel in the Old Testament is a response to the double summons, ‘Come!’ and, ‘Go!’” (ibid., 29, 30).

Legrand prefers to define mission as a “response to a divine call addressed to a people.”<sup>219</sup> This call must bring humans into a community who shares faith, celebrates, prays and sings, and blesses others. Israel’s mission must be experienced at all levels of life. The author raises the question of continuity between Testaments, and explains the danger of “spiritualizing” Old Testament realities in the New. He views the Testaments as complementary, going beyond the meanings of “unfulfilled” or “fulfillment.” Summing up his findings, Legrand shows that mission is basically the same in both Testaments because God “wished to call his people unceasingly to follow him, and thereby to find him in the unexpected and the unknown.”<sup>220</sup>

The author closes his survey of Old Testament mission by reminding the reader that mission has one target: other peoples, the foreigner. Abraham, boasting an Amorite and a Hittite as ancestors, had to face foreigners during his journey. Israel followed in his steps during the Exodus. God is in fact *the missionary*, he sends the prophets, he lights the world and sends his word out. “In the last analysis, before being a sending of prophets, the Servant, and messengers, mission is the beginning of a journey by God himself, who becomes Emmanuel, the God-with-us of the entire world. Mission is the coming of the Lord who is Sovereign of the universe, and it is the invitation to the peoples to celebrate this advent.”<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>220</sup> Israel has not been called together “to install itself in the material security of a safe situation and the spiritual comfort of a custom-made God all its own. This people was summoned together that it might embark on a journey. . . . Nothing would be more unbiblical than a smug satisfaction in goods possessed in security. Biblical Israel sees its thirst for peace endlessly confronted with the exciting, perilous encounter with the God who creates what is new” (ibid., 34, 35, 36).

<sup>221</sup> Ibid., 37.

## David Bosch

As an ecumenical scholar, David Bosch accepts theoretically that the New Testament cannot be divorced from the Old. But when speaking about mission in a practical way, he cannot see any relationship between mission in the Old Testament and New Testament.<sup>222</sup> He even quotes Rzepkowsky in saying that “the decisive difference between the Old and the New Testament is mission.”<sup>223</sup> Bosch asserts that there is no indication in the Old Testament that believers have been sent out, cross culturally. Without looking at the complete picture, he dismisses out of hand both the book of Jonah and the second part of Isaiah as having nothing to do with centrifugal mission. Although Bosch devotes time and space to demonstrate that the Gospel of Matthew describes Jesus’ mission in Old Testament terminology, he does not seem to realize that it is exactly this link that sheds light on Jesus’ justification of such passages as Isa 40-66, the book of Jonah, or the Psalms.<sup>224</sup>

In contrast with the Old Testament, the New Testament is seen as “essentially a book about mission.” Bosch cannot explain why there is an ambivalent attitude toward the nations in the Old Testament, although he declares that Israel’s history cannot be

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<sup>222</sup> David Jacobus Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. Bosch seems to realize that mission is present in the Old Testament, but chooses to declare that “mission is undefinable,” in order to avoid challenging the general understanding (9). Even when talking about the New Testament, he does not see a “uniform view of mission but, rather, a variety of ‘theologies of mission.’” For him, the New Testament authors “were less interested in definitions of mission than in the missionary existence of their readers” (ibid., 16).

<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid., 59. However, Bosch argues that the use of the Old Testament by Matthew is missionary, Jesus encouraging people to look for missionary opportunities around them, outside their circle.

comprehended without the history of the nations. Although Israel is not seen as missionary, God is recognized as such.

Bosch defines Israel's mission in the Old Testament from the "election for service perspective."<sup>225</sup> The nations are accepted only because of the universalism espoused by God, not by Israel. The author is convinced that God may save those Gentiles he has elected in advance only by means of a divine act, even without Israel's involvement as missionary.<sup>226</sup> Bosch's ecumenical theological background influences these statements.

#### David Filbeck

Filbeck writes from an evangelical perspective.<sup>227</sup> As a missionary he was confronted with questions regarding the primacy of Jesus or Buddha, and had to go back to the Old Testament to find that the missionary mandate of Abraham is older than both Jesus and Buddha. Although Filbeck recognizes the importance of the Great Commission (repeated five times in the New Testament), he goes back to the Creation account in Genesis to discover the authority behind the Commission. He indicates that the whole Hebrew Scripture presents a missionary message, not only parts of it. The Old Testament shaped the missionary mentality of the people living at the first coming of Christ, constituting the motivation behind the Great Commission.

Filbeck admits that the Great Commission does not answer many questions missionaries face today, but the answer is found in the Old Testament, particularly in its

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<sup>225</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>227</sup> David Filbeck, *Yes, God of the Gentiles, Too*.

missionary interpretation that is missing in hermeneutical approaches today.<sup>228</sup> Sensing the real problem, Filbeck decries the fact that many biblical interpretations presuppose or impose a lack of unity between the two Testaments, leading to missing the missionary dimension that gives structure to the Bible and unites its themes into a single motif. He prefers to follow the progression of understanding the will of God: winning the lost.

The author proposes a double-sided hermeneutic: one coming from inside the text that unites the different parts of Scriptures, the other guiding the reader by “mapping” the Scriptures and providing the hermeneutical tools so an overall understanding might emerge. The key to interpreting the Old Testament, they say, is the missionary message as revealed in the New Testament. Such a key is made up by direct statements and indirect foundational concepts applied to passages that do not have a missionary content to see how they fit and contribute to the missionary dimension of the Old Testament.

Looking at the missionary structure of the Bible, Filbeck demonstrates that the first eleven chapters of Genesis present the universals that will guide throughout the rest of the Scripture. God the Creator, the Lord, sin, and the nations form the background on

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<sup>228</sup> In a historical survey of hermeneutics, Filbeck shows that Protestants missed the missionary dimension by being preoccupied with defending the biblical doctrines on which they differed with Catholics and with each other. William Carey’s *Enquiry* showed that, while correctly applying exegesis to the Great Commission, they missed its interpretation. The next century shows that Protestants jumped to the other extreme, applying different missionary hermeneutics, but missing a theological and scriptural basis. Twentieth-century theology had to deal with the effects of the historical-critical method that landed mission in the sociological realm. Social evolution and progress were the buzzwords in twentieth-century mission. Fortunately, a conservative approach to the Scripture as being authoritative and inerrant helped the development of missions lately, but they were still motivated by the Great Commission and not by the Old Testament.

which the biblical story unfolds.<sup>229</sup> However, Filbeck uses a missionary model that starts only in Gen 12 with the choosing of Abraham.

After describing the two poles of the centripetal-centrifugal model, and analyzing Paul's use of it, Filbeck concludes that "both the 'centripetal and centrifugal consciousness' are to be kept in mind in the missionary interpretation of the Old Testament. . . . Both perspectives moreover are kept in tension in the Old Testament."<sup>230</sup>

Filbeck recognizes the election of Israel in the call of Abraham. He indicates that God remains the agency for blessing. However, Israel is called not only to represent the nations before God but also to extend God's presence into the world.

Monotheism is expressed in the Ten Commandments which "contain a missionary dimension often overlooked in interpreting and understanding this part of the Law of Moses."<sup>231</sup> Filbeck analyzes the first two of them and proves that by denying the existence of another god and the making of idols, God wanted to make sure the Israelites remained free to carry the blessings to others. When Israel turned to idolatry, it became territorially bound since an idol was lord only over a certain area. They lost the centrifugal aspect of mission, their mobility. Once they got to Canaan, idolatry, institutionalization, and an unbalanced focus on worship and religious life became dominant. The monarchy heightened ethnocentrism in Israel and this helped them

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<sup>229</sup> "Ethnicity is a universal spanning both space and time. Along with sin, and because of sin, the universality of ethnicity constitutes . . . the original missionary mandate of the Bible. It is an additional hermeneutical pointer that points to the missionary message of the Old Testament" (ibid., 55).

<sup>230</sup> Ibid., 48-49.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid., 69.



completely forget their missionary and priestly role. The kings were also those who introduced the idols of their foreign queens on Israel's territory.

God used the exile as a countermeasure to the self-serving of Israel. Filbeck believes that God used a three-fold plan to restore Israel to its status and blessing, but also to its mission: destruction, cleansing, and a reorientation or reinterpretation of the covenant, a new hermeneutic. The cleansing was not for Israel to become a purer people, but to become again a holy nation, a people set aside as a light to the nations.

By quoting Isaiah and Ezekiel, Filbeck shows that Israel was supposed to be more than a "silent witness," to actively make God's name known to the entire world.<sup>232</sup> "There are two ways of learning about God. The world can come to him for instruction (the 'centripetal' motion in missions) or his word will go forth to the world (the 'centrifugal' motion in missions). Both are equally true in the missionary message of the Old Testament."<sup>233</sup> These positive changes in Israel's life were the direct result of the forced contact with the nations.<sup>234</sup> The Jews had to learn that their God is the God of the nations, too. Because of the contact with the Greek language, the Jews were able to spread the message to the entire civilized world of that day through the Septuagint. The synagogues became missionary outposts, whereas the birth of the religious parties (the Pharisees, the Sadducees, or the Zealots) had missionary implications.

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<sup>232</sup> Isa 42:6, 7; Ezek 36:22-23; 39:7.

<sup>233</sup> "To emphasize that the Old Testament stresses only the 'coming,' while hermeneutically attractive, is nevertheless exegetically a misplaced emphasis" (Filbeck, *Yes, God of the Gentiles, Too*, 115).

<sup>234</sup> "The Israelites remaining, now called Jews, saw they could still be God's people without the Promised Land, without a monarchy, and certainly without idolatry" (ibid., 137).

Filbeck shows that Jesus simply affirmed the missionary hermeneutic of the Old Testament. He was the only Messiah who claimed to be the Savior of the entire world, not only of the Jews. “It was the universality of his message—the missionary interpretation of the Scriptures—that gave authority to his teachings.”<sup>235</sup> This particular hermeneutic, which upset the religious leaders and parties, formed the basis and the mandate behind the Great Commission, a hermeneutic that Paul also demonstrates.<sup>236</sup> In the Great Commission Jesus made explicit, in the form of a command, what all along was implicit in the Old Testament. The Jews knew that the Gentiles are to be included in the Kingdom. What was missing or was “dimmed” was the command to therefore go.

In retrospect, Filbeck considers that the Great Commission is the natural conclusion of the Old Testament, the summation of the missionary message of the Old Testament, the result of the missionary hermeneutic of the Old Testament, and also the true and final interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures.

#### David Burnett

Like many of his predecessors, David Burnett looks for the biblical basis of mission as expressed by the Latin root “to send.” For him, “mission lies at the core of theology, and within the very character and action of God himself.”<sup>237</sup> The author states his hermeneutical assumptions: “The Scriptures will be considered a unity.”<sup>238</sup> The role

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<sup>235</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>236</sup> Rom 4:9-10; 10:12-13.

<sup>237</sup> David Burnett, *The Healing of the Nations: The Biblical Basis of the Mission of God*, 12.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid., 18.

of the Old Testament is “not just preparation but is a major portion of the revelation of God. The New Testament fulfills the Old, but does not replace it (1 Cor 10:11).”<sup>239</sup>

Burnett begins with the story of Creation and looks for a worldview that forms in the first chapters of the Bible and becomes key in understanding the rest of the Scripture. He analyzes the characteristics of God, humanity, and the universe, and introduces the “cultural mandate” expressed in marriage, work, and government. Humans’ work was to take care of the earth, “to look after it and preserve it from harm,” while the role of governors reflected their authority given by God as co-regents.<sup>240</sup>

The introduction of sin to this earth caused humans to experience the wrath of God. Although not a popular concept today, “the wrath of God is an essential aspect of the whole of God’s dealing with humanity. The wrath of God shows first that God takes sin seriously in whatever form it manifests itself. . . . But God’s judgment is tempered with mercy.”<sup>241</sup> God’s search for humans in the Garden is considered by Burnett the beginning of God’s mission, later illustrated both with Noah and with the people at the tower of Babel.

The call of Abraham that requires separation and particularism takes place against the background of Gen 1-11, which is considered “universal history.” Burnett identifies three elements in Abraham’s mission: God’s initiative and call, the covenant (which included a great nation in a new country with a special blessing), and the commission

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<sup>239</sup> “One must avoid, therefore, concentrating on a few popular texts, instead seeking an integrated approach to the subject of mission” (ibid., 19).

<sup>240</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid., 36, 38.

(which includes conditions on both sides).<sup>242</sup> Both cursing and blessing in Gen 12:3 are to be seen in redemptive terms. “God’s justice seems to be central to his dealings with the nations which are judged in respect to their relationship to and attitude towards Israel. The nations are witnesses to the character of God.”<sup>243</sup>

Burnett sees both centrifugal and centripetal mission in the Old Testament. Although he follows Blauw and claims that centripetal mission is norm in the Old Testament (illustrated by the stories of the Queen of Sheba and Ruth), he also admits that “the little story of Jonah” is an example of centrifugal mission.<sup>244</sup>

The exodus motif is considered the main missionary motif of the Old Testament, and the author, later, builds his liberation theology on it. Election for service is emphasized, but the care for orphan, poor, or stranger is limited to within Israel’s borders. In fact, Israel was supposed to answer the divine choosing by worshipping YHWH and serving the nations. Their solidarity was centered on the covenant, while their worship centered on the God who redeemed them.

Burnett dedicates half of his book to the study of Israel in the Old Testament. Although he is not convinced that Israel was really a missionary nation, he concludes that the Old Testament is needed in order to understand mission in the New Testament.

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<sup>242</sup> Ibid., 49-51.

<sup>243</sup> “Israel was to become the centre of God’s redemptive purposes for humankind, to be the people of God—and so a witness to all. This was to be the mission of Israel to the nations. . . . Jonah is not portrayed as a missionary. He does not call the people at Nineveh to leave their gods and worship Yahweh nor even call them to repentance. He merely exposes their sin and proclaims a coming judgment. . . . The book of Jonah is not a book issuing a mandate for aggressive missionary outreach but a revelation of God’s love for all nations” (ibid., 52, 54, 107).

<sup>244</sup> “In the Old Testament one does not find the out-going thrust of missionaries who cross frontiers to pass on their message, but one does find the attraction of individuals to the nation of Israel itself” (ibid., 52-53).

### **Contemporary Approaches (1999-2009)**

Today's missiologists and theologians are confronted with the failure of previous missionary strategies and methods and many ask the question, What went wrong? A renewed interest in the biblical basis of mission has been spawned by the realization that mission as "presence" is part of the big picture. There is a special emphasis on contextualization or indigenization of mission and an attempt to include cultural aspects in the definition of mission. The challenge of post-modernity and post-Christianity, combined with the post-colonial missionary era, has sent scholars back to the biblical text to search for a new perspective on mission.

Old Testament theology has already had a period of focus on the unity of the Testaments marked by a number of authors. Brevard Childs moves towards systematic and historical elements, and argues that God's revelation in the Old Testament cannot be properly understood and interpreted if the sources are not embedded in their context. For Childs, God's covenant with Israel is such a context. Rolf P. Knierim emphasizes the importance of exegesis and comparison of texts in a systematic approach, and demonstrates the importance of themes such as creation, justice, and righteousness as illustrated in Gen 1-11 and Ps 33. Walter Brueggemann focuses on God as the subject of the Old Testament utterances, while Israel is his dialogue partner who often challenges God's expectations and assumptions. Paul R. House uses a diachronic approach to the Old Testament, looking for each book's distinctive message within the canon. Gerhard F. Hasel analyzes the different approaches used to study the Old Testament, proposing a canonical Old Testament theology that follows a multiplex approach but preserves the

relationship between the Testaments.<sup>245</sup> Although both the Old Testament and mission theology fields witness a trend to return to the canon of the Old Testament as normative, the array of opinions is still reflected in the diversity of theological works. The question for Old Testament mission theology remains: centripetal mission, centrifugal mission, both or none?

### Dan Beeby

In *Canon and Mission*, Dan Beeby decries the situation of Christendom in Europe, which he considers no longer a blessing, but a curse.<sup>246</sup> He argues for the recovery of the biblical canon in terms of inseparability of the two Testaments. The Old Testament, in his opinion, calls for a New One, and vice versa. The most significant context is the theological context of the entire Bible read in the present and read missiologically. He believes that the missiological context “must take precedence over

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<sup>245</sup> Brevard Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1992); Rolf P. Knierim, *The Task of Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995); Walter Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology: Essays on Structure, Theme and Text* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1992); idem, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1997); Paul R. House, *Old Testament Theology*; Gerhard F. Hasel, *Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991). Other authors who contributed with significant Old Testament studies are Rolf Rendtorff, *Canon and Theology: Overtures to an Old Testament Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1993); idem, *The Canonical Hebrew Bible: A Theology of the Old Testament* (Leiden: Deo Publishers, 2005); Horst Dietrich Preuss, *Old Testament Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1995); John Sailhamer, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology: A Canonical Approach* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995); and Bruce K. Waltke, *Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007).

<sup>246</sup> “The Bible from Genesis to Revelation, if taken as a unity, is a handbook for mission. Unfortunately, we have a theology in Europe that is almost completely innocent of mission.” H. D. Beeby, *Canon and Mission*, Christian Mission and Modern Culture series (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity, 1999), 3.

any of the possible historical, literary, or other contexts that present themselves.”<sup>247</sup> The author proposes a three-pronged mission as a solution to the conundrum: a mission to the individual (ourselves), a mission to the Church, and a mission to the culture.

Beeby considers that one reason for the lack of consensus about the nature of mission is the fragmentation and atomism that permeate so much understanding of the Bible. He maintains that the Bible presents a dynamic unity. Biblical totalities point clearly in the direction of mission and the need for mission. The more the Bible is reclaimed as a whole, the more the canonical scriptures will be seen as providing a missionary mandate, mission critique, and a missionary objective.<sup>248</sup>

The author proposes several methods of seeing the Bible as a unity: the type and antitype model, the promise and fulfillment, the interdependence of the Testaments, the dynamic move from the beginning to the end, the different relationships, and the covenants. The last model seems the most interesting: the fourfold promise made to Abraham. The fourth promise is of the blessing to the nations, and that promise “keeps you on the edge of your chair right through the rest of the Old Testament. That joins the Old Testament to the New, because throughout the Old Testament you have to wait expectantly—as the Jews waited—for the coming of Jesus Christ, the true light and

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<sup>247</sup> “The more one enters the mystery of that unity the more one is pointed in the direction of mission. . . . Once the pieces are seen to be parts of a mighty whole, one realizes that this great totality has a clear focus and that it coincides with what we know as mission” (ibid., 5-6).

<sup>248</sup> “Lacking a canonical reading of the Bible, with its inner critiques and self-correcting tensions, the biblical fragments tend to support fragmented mission with all its dangers of imbalance, single-issue fanaticism, and heresy” (ibid., 24).

blessing to the nations.”<sup>249</sup> From this perspective Gen 11 to Malachi is seen as the beginning of mission, or the first sending.

The author illustrates this encounter between the Word and the culture with the story of Exodus that has to be applied to current events in order to become relevant. He shows how the echoes of the Exodus are heard in the New Testament, and how the Exodus provided Jesus with a model and a framework for his ministry.<sup>250</sup>

For Beeby, the Bible presents the chosen people and the nations always distinct, but never separated. A dialogue between the chosen and the nations lies at the heart of the economy of salvation. The author argues that the nations appear in the Bible before Abraham’s call, and that they are God’s concern. Israel was called to existence for the nations.<sup>251</sup> There is a permanent tension between Israel and the nations, the nations being the enemy of Israel sometimes, God’s instrument for punishing Israel other times, a religious threat, or even a witness for Israel’s rebellion. But the main role of the nations was to give Israel occasions for witness and revelation. Speaking about Israel’s relationship with the nations, Beeby concludes that Israel existed for the nations, lived its life over against the nations, was a debtor to the nations, and finally was called to be a missionary to the nations. The same four-fold structure is applied to the church.

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<sup>249</sup> Ibid., 37-38.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid., 51, 53-57.

<sup>251</sup> “Creation and redemption meet in the nations and in some sense revolve round them. . . . They are, according to Gen 10, the work of God’s hands, the result of God’s blessing, and are ‘perfect’ and pleasing, as is shown by their number—seventy, a theological rather than an arithmetical number. Their variety is viewed positively and almost celebrated. In contrast, chapter 11 sees them cursed by variety, separation, and alienation, knowing God only as a judge” (ibid., 62-63).



The author recognizes that blessings come not only through Abraham, but also through Creation. He sees the covenant at Creation and the covenant with Noah (as well as other covenants in the Scripture) as being “impersonal, unconditioned, indiscriminate; they establish the natural order and are the conditions of human life; they require no response.”<sup>252</sup> On the other hand, the covenant with Abraham and Israel, and the New Covenant in Christ’s blood are considered limited, personal, requiring the response of obedience. However, all these covenants are inseparable.

Beeby also talks about centripetal and centrifugal mission, and believes that centripetal mission cannot be divorced from centrifugal mission in the Old Testament. For him, Israel at times is more than a presence (as Rowley, Blauw, and others argue); Israel is called to mission. He lists the book of Jonah, Deutero-Isaiah, and even the book of Job as missionary books *par excellence* in the Old Testament. Finally, the author sees centripetal mission continuing in the New Testament in a canonical relationship.

In the conclusion of his book, Beeby calls for a renewed missionary hermeneutic of the Bible that follows the inside principles of the canon, a hermeneutic that moves from Creation to the new Creation, from glory to glory.

Walter C. Kaiser, Jr.

Responding to the challenge that true mission begins in the New Testament with the Great Commission, Kaiser shows that both centrifugal and centripetal mission exist in the entire Bible.<sup>253</sup> He indicates that the Old Testament contains a similar passage to the

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<sup>252</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>253</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, *Mission in the Old Testament: Israel as a Light to the Nations*. However, the emphasis in the book is on centrifugal mission.

Great Commission in Gen 12:3, which sends back to Gen 3:15. The same concern for people is found in the book of Revelation (5:9; 7:9; 14:6) where “every nation and tribe and tongue and people” are mentioned. “Thus this theme of a mission to the whole world forms one giant envelope (a figure of speech called an *inclusio*) framing the whole Bible, from Genesis to Revelation.”<sup>254</sup>

Kaiser shows how both Paul and Peter refer to the prophecies in the Old Testament to support their mission to the Gentiles, especially Isa 49:6. Israel was chosen to be a priesthood, a “holy nation,” called to serve God and the peoples. The author’s main theme and contribution is a discussion of the role and nature of Israel’s mission. Was Israel supposed to go out and share the good news of salvation with others in a *centrifugal* way, or was Israel expected to care for them as a nation in a passive and *centripetal* mode? Kaiser argues for an active role that was already known to the Jews in the Old Testament times.<sup>255</sup>

The meaning of mission is linked to the God who sends. Prophets are called or sent by God, both to Israel and the nations, with announcements of divine judgment which are strong wakeup calls to repent and turn back to the Creator God. Israel is finally sent into exile “in order for them to act in accordance with his desire that the nation of Israel should be his agents whereby he could bless all the families of the earth.”<sup>256</sup>

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<sup>254</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>255</sup> “God’s eternal plan was to provide salvation for all peoples; it was never intended to be reserved for one special group as the Jews, even as an initial offer!” (ibid., 10).

<sup>256</sup> “By means of these Diaspora, or scatterings, the word of God would eventually be disseminated over large parts of the world of that day” (ibid., 13).

Kaiser chooses as a key concept for his approach the *blessing*, both as noun and verb. He credits the development of humanity from one pair to “families and tribes” (Gen 11) to God’s blessing in Gen 1. He also identifies three major crises: the Fall, the Flood, and the events at the tower of Babel, each crisis being followed by a blessing from God.

The blessing to Abraham (Gen 12:1-3) is threefold: a nation, a personal blessing, and a great name. The goal is clearly specified: to be a blessing for others. The responses of people to such blessings are either blessings in return, or curses. Kaiser notices that the blessing is translated as passive, indicating that it comes from God. He presents the blessing in opposition to the curse, but universal in character.

The author explains that election in the Bible has a precise meaning: service. He identifies three roles for Israel: “treasured possession,” “kingdom of priests,” and a “holy nation.”<sup>257</sup> Israel had a double duty, towards God and towards nations and peoples, but chose to forget the latter. Although the Jews were instructed how to treat even the resident alien in their midst (Exod 12:48; 22:21; Lev 19:33; Num 9:14), they instead focused on themselves. Israel did not like the nations, in spite of God’s plan.

Kaiser believes that “it had always been in the plan of God to give to the nation of Israel a king.”<sup>258</sup> David was supposed to be God’s chosen, all previous others (Gideon, Abimelech, Saul) being considered “usurpers.” The author challenges only Israel’s motivation “to be like other nations,” not their desire which he finds justified.

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<sup>257</sup> “They were to be treasures that he could move around and disperse as he pleased. . . . The Old Testament word ‘holy’ meant ‘*set apart wholly* for God’s use.’ This nation was to be set apart not only in their lives, but also in their service. Through them all the families of the earth were to receive the blessing God had in store for all who believed” (ibid., 22, 23).

<sup>258</sup> Ibid., 25. See also Deut 17:14-20.

The author connects the covenant with Abraham and the one with David. Quoting 2 Sam 7:18-19 he translates the last phrase as “this is the charter for humanity, O Lord Yahweh.”<sup>259</sup> Kaiser claims that the law, the Torah, can be translated as “charter” or “decree,” by which the plan of God is renewed and continued, being announced repeatedly. He rejects Filbeck’s move from universalism in Gen 1-11 to particularism during the giving of the Law, and then back to universalism during the time of the prophets, stating that the gospel was always God’s offer to all nations, through his chosen nation, based on a promise-plan.

Quoting Martin-Achard and Peters, Kaiser analyzes some of the Psalms that speak about the nations and Israel’s relationship with them. He chooses Pss 67, 96, and 117 that have not been analyzed by Peters and looks at them through Gen 12:1-3.<sup>260</sup>

Reviewing Peters’s statements that “nowhere in the Old Testament was Israel ‘sent’ to the nations,” Kaiser shows the presupposition Peters (and others like him) applied to the term “send” by linking it with the New Testament understanding of mission. Accepting that centrifugal mission is present in the Old Testament, the author presents a balanced picture of a centripetal and centrifugal approach, both for those times and for the *eschaton*.

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<sup>259</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>260</sup> In Ps 67 he recognizes the priestly role Israel is supposed to play for the nations. They should see God as Creator and provider and bring him glory. God is good but also just. In Ps 96 Kaiser parallels the term *basar* (to proclaim) to its New Testament counterpart, *euangelizomai*, indicating that this proclamation should go “among all the nations and among all the peoples” (ibid., 34). Kaiser points to v. 5 and shows that the psalm covers both the present time and the end days, indicating an active witness and proclamation to the Gentiles, in a centrifugal direction. In Ps 117 Kaiser underlines the motivation that should drive Israel to extol the name of God to the nations and praise him: YHWH’s grace and faithfulness shown to them. “Only redeemed Gentiles and Jews can praise God, hence the necessity of active missions in the Old Testament” (ibid., 36).

Kaiser is looking at God's use of individuals to reach Gentiles in the Old Testament, and also at individual Gentiles who accepted YHWH as their God. He starts with Melchizedek (Gen 14:18), Jethro the priest of Midian (Exod 18:1), Balaam (Num 22:5), and moves on to Rahab the prostitute (Josh 2:9-11), and Ruth the Moabite (Ruth 2:12).<sup>261</sup> Naaman comes to Israel because of the word of a slave girl, but the faith he displays when Israel's king wails in desperation evidences his understanding of God. Sent to dip in the Jordan, he finally accepts and returns to Elisha ready to bring "burnt offerings" to Yahweh, whom he now seems to know. Kaiser concludes that "Yahweh was the Lord of all nations even during Old Testament times. . . . God's mission was not exclusively Jewish in the Old Testament."<sup>262</sup>

God's call to Israel to be a light to the nations is illustrated in the Suffering Servant passages in Isaiah. Kaiser shows that even those commentators who claim Israel had only a centripetal duty from Abraham to Isaiah recognize the centrifugal universalism of these passages. The Servant of the Lord is a corporate figure representing Israel both as an individual and a group, the "seed of Abraham," carrying a spiritual mission rather than a political one. The meaning of *mišpat* is better reflected in the text (and context) as "instruction in judgment or the right."<sup>263</sup> The Servant's missionary role is to be "a covenant for the people and a light to the nations," as paralleled by the New

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<sup>261</sup> Ibid., 40-42.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid., 49. Kaiser states that "it is not too much of a jump in logic to assume that just as Jonah was a preacher of righteousness in the capital of Nineveh, so Elisha and the company of the prophets likewise delivered the message of the saving grace of God to Syria as well" (ibid., 50).

<sup>263</sup> Ibid., 59.

Covenant in Jer 31:31-34. The Servant is also to take Israel's remnant by hand "and guide them in the work of witnessing . . . 'to the ends of the earth.'"<sup>264</sup>

Kaiser notes that Jonah was "sent" by God with a message of impending judgment. The missionary purpose of the book comes in full force in Jonah 4:11 when God asks: "Should I not be concerned about that great city?" In contrast, Jonah is concerned about himself. His mission should have moved Israel to jealousy and action.<sup>265</sup>

After looking at the mission of Israel to the nations in Joel, Amos, Micah, Isaiah, and Jeremiah, Kaiser concludes his survey by studying Paul's justification of mission to the Gentiles. Paul (as well as James and Peter) uses Old Testament passages to indicate his understanding of mission as being in line with that of the prophets. His goal was to reach Tarshish (Spain), "the ends of the earth," which Kaiser connects with Isa 66:18.<sup>266</sup>

Andreas J. Köstenberger and Peter T. O'Brien

*Salvation to the Ends of the Earth* contains a chapter of concise and vigorous analysis of mission in the Old Testament. Mission is considered by Andreas Köstenberger and Peter O'Brien as starting before sin and running all the way to the final aspects of salvation. For them, "Christian" mission is mandatory. They propose a biblical-theological method combined with a salvation-historical approach that will

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<sup>264</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>265</sup> "The faith of a Gentile people surpassed that found among the so-called people of God. . . . This brings us to one of the principles found in missions: mission is one of the means God uses to provoke those who claim to be his people to jealousy and repentance" (ibid., 71).

<sup>266</sup> "But there could be no mistaking where Paul got his marching orders: they came from the Old Testament. The case for evangelizing the Gentiles had not been a recently devised switch in the plan of God, but had always been the long term commitment of the Living God. This is the same case that is consistently, even if at times only rudimentarily, found in the entire corpus of the Old Testament" (ibid., 82).

survey the Old and the New Testaments, claiming that the approach “makes room for discontinuity between mission in the two Testaments.”<sup>267</sup>

The authors refuse to define mission because in their view (quoting John Stott) the Bible does not define it. They instead rely on history, literature, and theology as pillars for their approach, which they admit is not neutral.

Köstenberger and O’Brien take as a departure point God’s creation and his purposes for humanity. They use the same “envelope” approach as Walter Kaiser’s, linking mission with salvation. Mission begins in Gen 1 when creation was declared “good” and in conformity with God’s purpose and intention. Because of sin, humans were no longer able to exercise their authority over the rest of creation in the expected way. Genesis 3:15 marks the *protoevangelium*, “the first glimmer of the gospel,” while the covenant with Noah simply reminds people of the plan God revealed at creation.<sup>268</sup>

For the authors, the first eleven chapters in Genesis reflect God’s judgment, while the blessing of Abram in Gen 12 opens up a new era.<sup>269</sup> Abram is considered the nucleus around which the great nation and the new people of God will form the redeemed people. The five “blessings” that occur in Gen 12:1-3 are considered the counterpoint to the five

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<sup>267</sup> Andreas J. Köstenberger and Peter T. O’Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 20.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>269</sup> Hints of this “new” era are already seen in Gen 3, 4, and 6 to 8. However, “Gen 12:1-3 is God’s gracious response which reverses the sin and downward spiral of chapters 3-11. . . . So dramatic and magnificent is this response that it is expressed in language similar to that of a new creation. In his summons to Abram God is about to effect a new creative work” (ibid., 28).

“curses” which appear in the previous chapters, while the call of Abram is declared “the divine response to the human disaster of Gen 3-11.”<sup>270</sup>

The authors combine the passive and reflexive meanings of the final verb *bless* in Gen 12:3, concluding that “peoples of the world would find blessing by coming to the Abrahamic descendants, rather than by later Israel’s outreach.”<sup>271</sup> Genesis 18 shows Abraham mediating the blessing to the world, while “the Abrahamic covenant continues throughout the Old Testament as the framework within which relationships between God and his people are presented.”<sup>272</sup> All the later covenants are related to the Abrahamic covenant, not to the Noachic covenant or to Gen 3:15.

Köstenberger and O’Brien specify that God is not referring to the Sinaitic covenant (of works) in Exod 19:5 when he requires commitment, but to the Abrahamic covenant of faith and grace. Israel’s role is seen as a priestly role, serving the world by “being separate, as a priest served his society by being distinct from it.”<sup>273</sup>

The authors reject Kaiser’s interpretation that Israel was supposed to be missionary by going out to the nations, on exegetical and theological grounds. Instead, they adopt Charles Scobie’s dispensational view that Israel related to the nations “historically through incorporation, and then eschatologically through ingathering.”<sup>274</sup> The incorporation is illustrated by Rahab and Ruth, although the authors recognize this

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<sup>270</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>274</sup> “There is no suggestion in the Old Testament that Israel should have engaged in ‘cross-cultural’ or foreign mission” (ibid., 35).



approach meets its limitation when Nehemiah and Ezra forbid intermarriages with foreigners.<sup>275</sup> The final ingathering of the nations is presented in a reunified Israel, which never occurred. However, the remnant is defined as “an Israel *within* an Israel.”<sup>276</sup>

God’s covenant with David is seen not as a partial fulfillment but as a reiteration of the covenant. David is considered a type of the true king of Israel, Jesus of Nazareth, who, as the son of God, will fulfill the role of son of David as well as son of Abraham.

In Köstenberger’s and O’Brien’s understanding, Jerusalem is to become the center of the world. The visit of the Queen of Sheba to Solomon is considered a paradigm for the nations’ later gathering at Jerusalem as illustrated in Isaiah, where Jerusalem becomes the center of a new creation. The ingathering of the nations (centripetal) is God’s work, not Israel’s, and it is placed at the end of time. The new covenant described by Jeremiah (Jer 30-33) and the prophecy of Joel are seen as applying to Israel first, and only *then* to “all flesh.” The authors expect Israel to be reestablished by God as a holy nation. “Although the expression ‘all flesh’, upon which the Spirit will be poured, signifies all Israel in the immediate context, it has overtones that are universal.”<sup>277</sup>

The authors believe that the book of Jonah has no missionary content or implications. They consider that the key question in the book is God’s character, Jonah (and his country fellows) having to learn that God’s mercy extends to the nations. As recipient of God’s covenantal love, Israel is supposed to show compassion to foreigners who respond to God’s mercy by immediate repentance and worship.

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<sup>275</sup> Ezra 9-11; Neh 13:23-31.

<sup>276</sup> Köstenberger and O’Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth*, 37.

<sup>277</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

The Servant of Yahweh works on behalf of Israel, and only indirectly affects other nations. The Servant is expected to do justice, and by judging the nations Israel would be vindicated. God's covenant with Abraham, in which the nations will be beneficiaries of the blessings, finds its fulfillment through the ministry of the Servant of Yahweh. The nations, in response, are supposed to bring back the remnants of Israel from all the countries where they were scattered. Although the authors announce that their concern is not the identity of the Servant (Israel vs. Jesus), they suggest this identity was clarified in the coming of the Messiah. It is understandable that assigning the Servant role to Israel would also mean assigning them the Servant's missionary task. Concluding, it seems that Köstenberger and O'Brien's approach is strongly eschatological and dispensational, allowing only for centripetal mission in the Old Testament.

Richard Bauckham

In *Bible and Mission: Christian Mission in a Postmodern World*, Richard Bauckham proposes a hermeneutic for the Kingdom of God. Although neither a biblical theology, nor a biblical basis for mission, this hermeneutic will help one "to read the Bible in a way that takes seriously its missionary direction."<sup>278</sup>

Bauckham's hermeneutic follows a movement from the particular to the universal, and is declared canonical (reading the Bible as a whole), narrative (both metanarrative and individual), connecting with people's experience. Placed against such a background, mission becomes a movement into the future of God, from a particular past

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<sup>278</sup> Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Mission: Christian Mission in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003), 11.

to a universal future. The author indicates that this movement takes place from Gen 12 onwards, without addressing Gen 1-11.<sup>279</sup>

From a geographical or spatial perspective, his hermeneutic follows a movement from the center to the periphery, from one place to every place, to the ends of the earth. The social movement perspective grows from one to many, or from Abraham to the nations. The final goal of the metanarrative cannot be described in historical narratives and terminology, but only into a metanarrative about the Kingdom of God. Bauckham warns that this development from one to many, from the center to the margins, should not be equated with the progressivist theory of mission influenced by the Enlightenment.<sup>280</sup>

The movement from one to many in the Old Testament is illustrated by Abraham, Israel, and David. They represent the interrelated trajectories of blessing, of God's revelation of himself to the world, and of his rule and kingdom. Abraham is singled out by God, against the international background of Gen 10-11. God's promise indicates that he is not going to give up the nations but use Abraham as a vector of blessing for them.

Although the blessing is recognized as the key word in God's promises to Abraham, it remains "no more than a promise and even as promise drops largely out of view."<sup>281</sup> Using Jer 4:1-2 as support, Bauckham posits that "in order for the nations to be blessed Israel need only be faithful to YHWH. Her life with YHWH will itself draw the

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<sup>279</sup> Based on his criteria, Gen 1-11 would be a movement from universal to particular.

<sup>280</sup> Bauckham, *Bible and Mission*, 20. These claim to discern the triumphalist purposes of God in every situation.

<sup>281</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

nations to YHWH so that they too may experience his blessing.”<sup>282</sup> The reference to Egypt and Assyria as God’s people and the work of his hands (Isa 19:24-25) is seen as an echo of God’s promise to Abraham, with more echoes in the New Testament. Abraham stands as a symbol and guarantee that all nations will finally be blessed.

Bauckham explains what the biblical meaning of blessing is: God’s provision for human flourishing. It means “to know God himself in his generous giving,” emphasizing the relational aspect.<sup>283</sup> It is universal and goes out from God and returns to him. The author notices that Gen 3 and 4 represent the background on which the blessing turns into curse, and since then the curse joins the blessing, even in the promise to Abraham.

The second trajectory, from Israel to the nations, is concerned with the knowledge of who God is. All salvation acts of God for Israel are witnessing opportunities, indicating that God can save all who turn to him and recognize him as the only God.

The Davidic choice, the third trajectory, is often related to the geographical position of Zion at the world trade crossroads, as God’s choice for his universal rule. Although the monarchy was not God’s ideal for Israel, King David ruled as God’s representative on earth, although he did not have dominion over all the nations. Bauckham calls this “representative geography” that helps the reader understand the Old Testament universalism in prophecy.

Based on his analysis of the three trajectories from one to the many, Bauckham concludes that “God’s purpose in each of these singular choices was universal.”<sup>284</sup>

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<sup>282</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid., 46.

Without supporting his statement, he declares that “none of these forms of the biblical movement from the particular to the universal is, strictly speaking, mission.”<sup>285</sup>

The author looks at Jesus as the central element of the continuity between the Testaments, pointing at his singularity. Recognizing that even Paul uses the Old Testament to justify his mission and identify a consistent divine strategy, Bauckham believes that the Old Testament is simply a background for the New Testament mission.

Speaking about centrifugal and centripetal mission, Bauckham defines them in relation to Jerusalem, the geographical center. He shows that Jesus’ speeches relate to the same location. Although mentioning that centripetal represents the Old Testament’s mission and centrifugal the New Testament’s, the author identifies both aspects in Jesus’ sayings, side by side. However, he concludes that “mission is not the explicit point in this saying of Jesus,” and that geography is used only as metaphor.<sup>286</sup>

Bauckham considers that the New Testament believers understood the meaning of the Temple as no longer a building but a live community. Instead of having only one geographical center, now there are many centers.<sup>287</sup>

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<sup>285</sup> “Abraham, Israel and David are not sent to evangelize the world. But these three major trends of the biblical story are what make the church’s mission intelligible as a necessary and coherent part of the whole biblical metanarrative ” (ibid., 47). Bauckham insists that other theologians are right when they say that the concept of mission itself is scarcely to be found in the Old Testament. He finds it necessary to add that, in spite of this weakness, the Old Testament remains essential for the understanding of Christian mission.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid., 74. The sending of an individual (Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Jesus) is interpreted as “authorization to speak and act in God’s name,” not as a literal centrifugal mission.

<sup>287</sup> “The permanent value of the image of the two directions of movement – centrifugal and centripetal – is not tied to any particular geography, though it will always, like all human life, have geographical contexts” (ibid., 77). Bauckham believes that the particularity of the Temple on mount Zion is not replaced but fulfilled by Jesus.

Quoting Newbigin, Bauckham recognizes that “all interpretations [of history] arise not merely from the historical data but also from the presuppositions, axioms, models and paradigms we bring to the data.”<sup>288</sup> He insists that we know God in particular situations, and that the whole Bible follows the pattern from particularity to universality. The biblical metanarrative is not based on the idea of human progress (although the human involvement is recognized), but on God’s initiative and plans which are comprehensive but inscrutable. In this light, mission is not the imposing of a certain pattern of historical events, but openness to God’s intervention and variation in history.

Bauckham believes that the Bible does not have a “carefully plotted single storyline, like, for example, a conventional novel,” but rather a plurality of angles on the same subject matter.<sup>289</sup> The Bible does not summarize the whole story or offer “a final adequate interpretation that would never need to be revised or replaced.” The author describes the biblical structure as “untidy,” with fragments that “lead nowhere and too many that seem to point in opposite directions.”<sup>290</sup> For him, the Bible contains claims to universal truth, but this truth is debatable. He prefers the truth to be “witnessed,” a term less coercive than mission. Witnessing means “the ability to speak from observation and experience of the God whose identity is not universally evident in the mere nature of things but must be known from his particular story with Israel and Jesus.”<sup>291</sup>

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<sup>288</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: Sketches for a Missionary Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 98-99; quoted in Bauckham, *Bible and Mission*, 86.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>290</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid., 100.

Bauckham concludes his book by accepting that the Bible, due to its openness and acceptance of so many angles and stories, becomes “the story of all stories,” a global metanarrative that opposes all other coercive metanarratives, political or otherwise. He emphasizes that God’s people should cross borders and boundaries, and go back to the Bible, “outward in solidarity especially with the victims and the neglected, and forward in hope for the coming of the kingdom of God.”<sup>292</sup>

Arthur Glasser

From the beginning Arthur Glasser is concerned with the hermeneutic one uses when reading the Bible, the Old Testament in particular. The Bible is considered a missionary book in its entirety, “the revelation of God’s purpose and action in mission in human history.” The Old Testament is revelation as well as the New Testament, both Testaments being “organically related in a dynamic and interactive relationship.”<sup>293</sup>

For Glasser, biblical revelation follows a progressive pattern, and the New Testament cannot be understood without the Old Testament. He points to elements of continuity and discontinuity between the Testaments.<sup>294</sup> The Old Testament is seen as a mission failure, so “we are obliged to refer each Old Testament text to the New

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<sup>292</sup> Ibid. 112.

<sup>293</sup> Arthur Glasser et al., *Announcing the Kingdom: The Story of God’s Mission in the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003), 17. In this work, Glasser develops on the Kingdom of God theme he addressed earlier: “The kingdom of God is one of the central, overarching themes of the Bible” (“The Whole-Bible Basis for Mission,” in Arthur F. Glasser and Donald A. McGavran, *Contemporary Theologies of Mission* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1983], 32).

<sup>294</sup> “One cannot remain in the Old Testament without becoming restless and sensing a need for something that the Old Testament by itself cannot provide. . . . Old Testament constantly looks forward to something beyond itself. . . . Only the New Testament makes the Old Testament fully intelligible” (Glasser et al., *Announcing the Kingdom*, 19, 27).

Testament for a verdict, whether it is ratification, modification, or judgment.”<sup>295</sup> He concludes that “a hermeneutic that silences parts of the Old Testament, or enables us to hear only its easy parts, or arbitrarily confines the total biblical revelation or any particular subject to New Testament passages, will not do.”<sup>296</sup>

Genesis 1-11 constitutes “primeval history” and its value is only that of a “cultural” mandate. The author admits, however, that the Creation account has a universal significance and creates the obligation and right for humans to try to know the God whose image they bear, and share it with others.<sup>297</sup> The Creation account represents the beginning of the self-disclosure of God, which is part of his mission.

When blessing Abraham, God is concerned not only with individuals but with families, peoples, and nations. However, for Glasser the future begins only in Gen 12:3 and “only after Pentecost do the people of God consciously begin to sense that they possess a universal faith for all nations.”<sup>298</sup>

The covenants start with Noah. “We discern in this covenant the beginnings of a new sequence in God’s dealings with humankind,” because God’s pledge to Noah included all peoples and was predicated on the divine faithfulness.<sup>299</sup> However, Glasser

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<sup>295</sup> Ibid., 23. Glasser also believes that “many essential perspectives and features of our biblical faith are not explicitly developed in the New Testament because the Spirit of God has already adequately developed them in the Old Testament” (ibid., 19).

<sup>296</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>297</sup> “The Great Commission explicitly expressed what the Creation account implies” (ibid., 36).

<sup>298</sup> “The New Testament shows that Christ’s second coming has a relationship to mission” (ibid., 26).

<sup>299</sup> Ibid., 49.



does not recognize Israel's mission towards the "Noachides." The covenant at Sinai is only an "extension" of the initial covenant made with Abraham and the patriarchs.<sup>300</sup>

Glasser reads the Old Testament as a book of judgment. Integrity requires judgment, even when God's own people break the covenant or mistreat the minority peoples living in Israel's territory. The diversification of humanity and the ethnic pluralism in Gen 11, following the Babel story, are not seen as God's judgment. Glasser reads God's mercy in speeding the inevitable process of linguistic and cultural diversification, avoiding the destruction of the whole human race determined to rebel against him. God proves to be a God of both justice and grace. The author rightly indicates that certain presuppositions must be drawn from Gen 1-11 "without which all subsequent reflection on mission will be invalid."<sup>301</sup>

Glasser assumes that God needs a servant people and that salvation history begins with Abraham. He states that by choosing Israel "God deliberately turned away from humanity in the collective sense,"<sup>302</sup> while "Abraham's election and God's covenant with him represent the first expression of God's redemptive concern for all nations."<sup>303</sup>

Describing Israel's mission in centrifugal and centripetal terms, Glasser follows Bengt Sundkler and states that "the dominant Old Testament emphasis is centripetal. Only occasionally does one encounter centrifugal overtones. This means there is almost

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<sup>300</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid., 56, 57. Later, Glasser and his editors seem to contradict themselves: "That Israel was elected by God does not mean that other nations have been rejected by God. The Old Testament never states or even implies that individuals or nations were ever elected unto damnation" (ibid., 82).

<sup>303</sup> Ibid., 57.

no evidence in the Old Testament of Israelites putting forth effort to share their knowledge of God with the neighboring nations.”<sup>304</sup> The author calls this “the tragedy of Israel itself. . . . Both Israel’s separation from the nations and the ultimate centrifugal responsibility to it of Abraham’s seed will be seen as necessary, as we move into the complex but not discordant world of the Old Testament revelation.”<sup>305</sup>

Glasser believes that “mission involves the encounter between the people of God and the nations as God’s mission unfolds through human history.”<sup>306</sup> The Exodus is considered greater than Creation and the best example of mission among the nations to make God known to them, Moses being a cross-cultural missionary. Because of God’s theocratic presence, Israel is only an incipient Kingdom of God. The Old Testament warfare, in which Yahweh leads, cannot be compared with his New Testament Kingdom where he fights a different kind of warfare, against principalities and powers.

Glasser claims that Israel started to reach out to other nations only to create a bigger political kingdom. The incorporation of proselytes in the community of Israel was part of their mission. The sojourners (*gerim*) were supposed to be “present for the solemn reading of the law,” being “exposed to its demands and accountable for their response.”<sup>307</sup> Although not allowed full status, foreigners were accepted in Jewish religious life. Glasser believes that only when Israel lost its ethnical identity and became a religious community in exile, did she begin to realize the potential for spiritual

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<sup>304</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>305</sup> Ibid., 64-65.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid., 75, 78.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid., 120.

outreach. The exile gave Israel another chance to make God known among the nations.

<sup>308</sup> Their double duty was to survive as a nation and to serve their captors. Glasser believes that God “was in effect telling them to carry out all the obligations of the cultural mandate.”<sup>309</sup> Esther and Mordecai, and Daniel and his friends are given as examples.

The Kingdom paradigm showed its dangers when people believed that God, as a King, depended on them as a people. When God’s choice is separated from its goal—to fulfill God’s purposes—we end up with expectations but no obligations or responsibility. Glasser believes that the books of Jonah and Ruth are intended to rebuke Israel for its narrow particularism. Such views indicate the assumption that centrifugal mission is not necessarily expected from Israel.

On the other hand, speaking about the Suffering Servant and his mission being fulfilled through death, Glasser shows that “the Gentile nations for whom he would die confess that they deserved what he vicariously endured on their behalf (Isa 53:4-12). The nations exalt him exactly at the point where Israel let him down.”<sup>310</sup>

Glasser claims that one could hardly find in the Old Testament any concern or expression of compassion for the nations, only for God’s vindication before the nations. He accepts that the prophets (especially Isaiah) speak about centrifugal mission, but prefers to believe it applies only to the eschatological future. The author concludes that

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<sup>308</sup> “These judgments—taking his people into captivity after destroying their national and religious life—were designed to strip them of all that previously enabled them to live apart from him in indifference to God’s will” (ibid., 128).

<sup>309</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>310</sup> Ibid., 148. The Servant Songs in Isaiah include all the main themes previously applied to Israel: election, divine appointing, preservation, universal mission, and triumph. However, the prophet adds suffering, rejection, and death to the positive list (ibid., 149).

“Isaiah’s vision by itself underscores the incompleteness of the Old Testament revelation of God’s redemptive concern for the nations.”<sup>311</sup> Speaking about Messiah and his Kingdom, Glasser goes even further to affirm that, “according to the Old Testament, the final salvation that the Messiah will bring will be all-inclusive. . . . It will embrace the totality of human existence and will be cosmic in significance.” But even under such auspices, “the passivity of a restored and renewed Israel will be a dominant motif.”<sup>312</sup>

Although most Jews rejoiced over the conversion of Gentiles, “proselytes were welcomed but not always sought.”<sup>313</sup> Glasser justifies the later mass conversions at Pentecost and during the first stages of the Early Church by the existence of a significant constituency of proselytes.<sup>314</sup> He closes his survey by pointing to the “terrible incompleteness to the Old Testament. The history of Israel,” he says, “is inconclusive.”<sup>315</sup>

James Chukwuma Okoye

In *Israel and the Nations*, Okoye proposes a hermeneutic for studying mission in the Old Testament.<sup>316</sup> He writes from the Catholic tradition. In the Foreword of the book,

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<sup>311</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>312</sup> Ibid., 156. According to Bavinck, “Israel shall not so much itself go out to attract the nations, but rather the jealousy of the heathen will be quickened by Israel’s spiritual riches in God” (Johannes H. Bavinck, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions*, 23; quoted in Glasser et al., *Announcing the Kingdom*, 156).

<sup>313</sup> Glasser et al., *Announcing the Kingdom*, 170.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid., 175. “In the main Jews were not only eager to make converts but successful as well (Matt 23:15)” (ibid., 176).

<sup>315</sup> Ibid., 179.

<sup>316</sup> James Chukumwa Okoye, *Israel and the Nations: A Mission Theology of the Old Testament* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2006). The author assumes that his readers come either with a mission background or a biblical background, but not both (xiv).

Carolyn Osiek very concisely summarizes the problem: “What is the role of the Old Testament in Christianity? Is it only to prove the superiority of the Christian revelation, or to justify political claims without regard to contemporary suffering?”<sup>317</sup>

Although recognizing as authoritative bodies of texts not included in the Jewish canon, Okoye claims that the integrity of the Old Testament as the Word of God is guaranteed in his book, preserving the organic links between the Testaments without reducing one to the other. The author also employs the Documentary Hypothesis and the sources that wrote the biblical text, as espoused by the historical-critical methodology.<sup>318</sup>

The author believes that Israel was not missionary at the beginning but became later on. For him the covenant between God and Israel was particularistic. Only when Israel opened up her covenant to include the Gentiles, then the nation became clearly missionary oriented. Only Israel was elected, and election stands in tension with mission.

Okoye insists that “such a focus is to be read not in isolation but in relation to internal transformations of the tradition that indicate that Israel’s election had a missionary intention.”<sup>319</sup> Since the Bible “contains different models of mission operative

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<sup>317</sup> Carolyn Osiek, in the Foreword to *Israel and the Nations*, by James Okoye, xi. She admits that the discussion centers not on Bible *and* Mission but on Bible *as* Mission.

<sup>318</sup> Okoye insists that today’s reader of the biblical text must keep in mind the redactional process that did not alter the previous text but included several versions side by side, thus ending up with tensions between universalism and particularism, which are opposites, in the same passage.

<sup>319</sup> Okoye, *Israel and the Nations*, 3. However, Okoye is ready to accept Norman Gottwald’s theory that Israel was formed in Canaan from oppressed peasants under the influence of the Moses group that came from Egypt, simply because under such a scenario “election would be intimately connected with mission.” He concludes that in the Old Testament “the theme of mission shows itself to be the necessary accompaniment of that of election” (ibid., 4).

in different faith communities at different times,”<sup>320</sup> Okoye introduces his contribution to the mission theology in the Old Testament under four faces of mission: the universality of salvation and righteousness before Yahweh, the “community-in-mission,” the centripetal mission, and the centrifugal mission.

The author rejects the exclusive Christological reading of the Old Testament which “almost silences its independent voice,” but similarly disagrees with those who see the Old Testament as self-contained Scripture. He recognizes that “divergent faith perspectives may thus be a factor in the divergence of interpretations.”<sup>321</sup>

Okoye proposes Gen 1 as a blueprint for mission.<sup>322</sup> He notices the blessing of Gen 1 that precedes the blessing of Abraham in Gen 12. As “image,” humans are to fill the earth, subdue and beautify it because God created the earth in a “frontier” state. The role of Gen 1-11 is to explain that all the peoples of the earth need blessing, as a result of all the curses on the soil, on the serpent, on Cain, and on Canaan. Although the author recognizes that the story could continue thus far only by God’s grace and forbearance, he considers that only Abraham became the embodiment of this grace.<sup>323</sup>

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<sup>320</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>322</sup> Due to his assumption that the biblical text in Gen 1 is a result of redactional input, the author believes the Creation account is a theological reflection rather than a straightforward historical description. It is considered a myth that was already part of the ancient Near East environment in which Israel formed as a nation. As a result, “there is no primordial principle of evil, for God looked on all God had made and found it very good (Gen 1:31). . . . Poetry will, however, retain the old motif of the ‘cosmic battle.’ . . . Creation out of nothing is not found in the Old Testament” (ibid., 25-27).

<sup>323</sup> Commenting on the reflexive and passive meanings of Abraham as the blessing for the nations, as a paradigm, and a source or agent of blessing, the author suggests that the universalistic editorial input changed the text, and that “earliest Israel did not yet understand the blessing of Abraham in a missionary and universalistic sense” (ibid., 48).

Okoye discovers that God never intended that Israel become an ethnic entity, separated from the Gentiles, but a spiritual one based on faith. He concludes that “the embers of mission would not glow in Israel until Israel rediscovered the primacy of righteousness of God, who freely calls all humanity to Godself.”<sup>324</sup>

The second face of mission, the “community-in-mission,” assumes that all laws are considered part of the covenant between God and Israel or embedded within its context. Israel has to become a sacral worshipping covenant community, a model of a just society in the Promised Land. It is not only separation from other nations but aggregation to Yahweh. As a “kingdom of priests” Israel is a community-in-mission serving others “by bringing them closer to God” and serving God by “mediating God’s revelation and decrees to the community.”<sup>325</sup> The implication is that the goal of election is mission, not salvation.<sup>326</sup> The main duty of a priest, the doxology, becomes missiological.

For Okoye, the book of Jonah is a fictional prophetic tale with a theological intent. Universalism and particularism stand in conflict and tension. The Ninevites believe in Yahweh the same way Abraham believed God and thus were considered righteous before God and their city was spared. God’s love and salvation are not exclusively confined to Israel, and “mission is about God’s free gift of deliverance or

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<sup>324</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>325</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>326</sup> However, election proves to be no guarantee against divine retribution. When Israel manifested injustice and unrighteousness, and forgot its community-in-mission role, leading nonbelievers to disrespect God, it became God’s enemy.

salvation for all peoples.”<sup>327</sup> The nations live by God’s mercy, the same as Israel does, because God’s unmerited grace is universal.

The author believes that from the time of the exile God changed the strategy in his relationship with people. Personal responsibility replaces corporate retribution, while divine surgery to replace peoples’ hearts precedes true repentance. Because there is no mentioning of the repossession of the land (Jer 31:31-34), all nations may discover themselves in the promise. The focus is solely on God’s character. Mission becomes all God’s work, in which God’s people simply share.

The third face of mission, centripetal, is seen in the Psalms which indicate that true worship leads to true society. God’s kingdom is encompassing all nations, with Israel the medium of praise of Yahweh by the nations. Only Yahweh protects, saves, and deserves to be worshipped.<sup>328</sup>

Isaiah 2:2-5 is the classical text for centripetal mission in the Old Testament. It is “the earliest expression of a belief in the eschatological glorification of Mount Zion,” although Okoye believes it belongs to the (post-)exilic period.<sup>329</sup> Mount Zion becomes the center of attraction, with a moral and spiritual focus rather than geographical. The nations come to the mountain by themselves, attracted by the Torah revealed there. This Torah offers peace and fulfillment, and responds to the deepest human need.<sup>330</sup>

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<sup>327</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>328</sup> “God’s glory can be fully realized only when the families of nations share fully together in the worship of Yahweh and in life with Yahweh” (ibid., 108).

<sup>329</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>330</sup> Ibid., 113.



The last face of mission, centrifugal, is found in Isa 56:1-8, the earliest mention of Gentiles religiously converting to Yahweh, based on an inclusive covenant. As a result, Egypt, Israel, and Assyria stand as blessings for the rest of the nations. Israel reaches its goal only when the blessing to bless is shared. This remnant of nations is defined not in national or ethnic terms but in confessional language.

The centrifugal aspect of mission is also seen by Okoye in Isa 66:19, in the sending of Jonah, and in the activity of the Jewish Diaspora in Egypt. However, the author considers that the nations will not come to or become Israel; acknowledging the power of Yahweh is not the same as joining Israel in the worship of Yahweh.

Okoye disagrees with authors who consider that Israel was never in exile to bring redemption to the world. “Transformed Zion is not for the ‘Servants of Yahweh’ alone. Yahweh has other servants also, whom Yahweh has taken from the nations (Is 56:6; 66:19) and who equally inherit ‘my holy mountain.’”<sup>331</sup>

Finally, Okoye proposes that we read mission in the Old Testament from a diversity of angles and allow for at least the four faces of mission.

Christopher J. H. Wright

In *The Mission of God*, Christopher Wright proposes mission as the basis for the entire Bible instead of just one of the themes in it.<sup>332</sup> His declared goal is to read the Bible missiologically, with a missional hermeneutic. Although the focus is on the Old Testament, the author preserves the big picture by making frequent reference to the New

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<sup>331</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>332</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative*.

Testament. He admits he reads the Old Testament in the light of the New, “in submission to the One who claimed to be its ultimate focus and fulfillment.”<sup>333</sup> The author is trying to recreate the biblical worldview by emphasizing the great themes of biblical theology.

Wright divides the book into four major sections: The Bible and Mission, The God of Mission, The People of Mission, and The Arena of Mission. In The Bible and Mission the emphasis is on creating a hermeneutic that will allow the mission of God to become the framework for reading the Scriptures. In his view, “mission is a major key that unlocks the whole grand narrative of the canon of Scripture.”<sup>334</sup> The whole Bible is considered a missional phenomenon, being the “product of and the witness to the ultimate mission of God.”<sup>335</sup> Human mission simply derives from the mission of God.

The main presupposition of the book is that “Israel was not mandated by God to send missionaries to the nations.”<sup>336</sup> Because of the centrifugal meaning associated to the word *missionary*, Wright prefers not to use it in association with the Old Testament. Instead, Wright prefers the term *missional* because it allows the reader to pour his/her own meaning in what is “missional” and to avoid the centrifugal aspect.<sup>337</sup> Thus, Israel is no longer a missionary to the nations but has only a missional role. By substituting the term, Wright avoids looking for a missionary mandate for Israel to go to the nations.

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<sup>333</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>334</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>335</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>336</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>337</sup> Analyzing the definitions of the terms related to mission, Wright proposes that the term *missional* gains precedence over *missiological*, because the term *missionary* is associated with the colonial era (based on a parallel to covenant and covenantal).

Without checking the assumptions and principles employed when approaching the text, Wright assumes his reading of the New Testament is safe enough and satisfactory for understanding the Old Testament. He is quick to admit that “in searching the Scriptures for a biblical foundation for mission, we are likely to find what we brought with us—our own conception of mission, now festooned with biblical luggage tags.”<sup>338</sup>

The author believes that the Old Testament writers should be included in the “hermeneutic of coherence,” together with the New Testament authors. However, he makes a difference between the messianic reading (up to Christ) and the missional reading (from Christ on) that separates the Scriptures and creates two different hermeneutics. Practically, the unity of the Bible is affected.

Wright recognizes the balance between particularity and universality in the Old Testament (as in Gen 12, or Exod 19), but he does not see the same balance in the centrifugal-centripetal model. Abraham is seen as the only recipient of blessing, and the nations have to come to him if they want to be blessed. It is not difficult to see why the author places such an important role on ethics, and the value of it for today’s mission.<sup>339</sup>

Although Wright admits that Israel as God’s chosen people existed for the sake of the nations, he believes that the nations were supposed to simply watch as spectators to

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<sup>338</sup> Ibid., 37. There is always the danger of distorting the text by imposing a certain framework on it. In Anthony Billington’s words, “The question is more what sort of *control* the framework exercises over the text, and whether the text is ever allowed to *critique* the framework at any point” (Anthony Billington, as quoted in *ibid.*, 26).

<sup>339</sup> Ethics is both mission and the people’s response to God’s challenge. He reduces the mission of Israel to “live as God’s people in God’s land for God’s glory. . . . How would the nations come to know of the uniqueness of YHWH as the living God and of his saving action in history unless they are drawn by the ethical distinctiveness of God’s people?” (*ibid.*, 394, 385). The author analyzes the human being as reflected in the Scriptures, and why the good news has to be carried to all who share God’s image. Wright identifies in Gen 1-3 God’s ideal for humans, the way sin affected humans and their relationships, and appeals for a Creational ethic.

what God did in and for Israel, and the way Israel responded. The land received by Israel and the responsibilities to take care of it were supposed to be a testimony for the surrounding nations. The author assumes that Israel understood its role as passive, expecting the nations to come to Jerusalem if interested. Impressed by the volume that Israel's history occupies in the Old Testament, he seems to believe that centripetal mission was God's will in the Old Testament.<sup>340</sup>

What surprises is the frequency with which Wright, although looking for a missiological hermeneutic, finds almost none in the Old Testament. For example, he cites Paul in Acts 13:47 (quoting Isa 49:6) identifying with the missiological hermeneutic of the Old Testament, but then adds "if ever there was one."<sup>341</sup> Such statements reveal the author's presuppositions behind the conclusions: There is no missional hermeneutic in the Old Testament, at least in the New Testament's form.

The second section, *The God of Mission*, presents a God whose authority comes from his uniqueness. Israel's monotheistic religion is based on this uniqueness that describes God as graceful and just both towards Israel and the nations. The author claims that YHWH intervenes in the life and fortunes of pagan nations and that he is able to do it without Israel's help, thus justifying his centripetal view of mission. Any "exception" (i.e., Isa 66:19) is dismissed as an eschatological expectation.<sup>342</sup>

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<sup>340</sup> "Israel was the steward of the knowledge of God. But God's will to be known to all people is one of the driving forces of biblical mission" (ibid., 262). He quotes Deut 4:6-8 and Isa 51:4, showing that the nations are watching Israel, waiting for the "light" to shine on them.

<sup>341</sup> Ibid., 67. The author's assumptions seem to be stronger than the text and the context.

<sup>342</sup> "It is not necessary to read a missionary mandate into this role within the Old Testament itself, in the sense of Israelites being physically sent out to travel to the nations to bear witness to this knowledge" (ibid., 90-92).

Monotheism is linked to mission. Wright builds a strong case against the idols as being “nothing” compared with the real God, and worshipping such “nothings” robs the true God of his glory. Worship becomes the corollary of mission in both the Old and the New Testaments. “So there is a close link between the monotheistic dynamic of Israel’s faith and the glorious richness of Israel’s worship. . . . And this, in a nutshell, is a missional perspective, even though there is no centrifugal missional mandate.”<sup>343</sup>

In the third section the author focuses on the people of mission, starting only with Abraham.<sup>344</sup> God’s covenant with Abraham is for him “the single most important biblical tradition within a biblical theology of mission and a missional hermeneutic of the Bible.”<sup>345</sup> Although he describes the arch that covers the time span between Gen 12 to Rev 22, Wright misses a very important segment that is key to understanding mission in the rest of the Scriptures and Abraham’s commission: Gen 1-11. In order to preserve Abraham’s role as the first missionary, Wright suggests that Gen 10:31, which mentions languages, indicates that the next chapter, 11:1, “is not chronologically sequential.”<sup>346</sup>

Exegeting some passages in the Psalms and Prophets, thought to reveal God’s ideal for Israel and humanity, the author shows that the nations will come to worship and glorify YHWH because they have already experienced his blessings. Wright states that

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<sup>343</sup> Ibid., 132. Wright’s presuppositions against centrifugal mission surface again even when the topic does not call for such a qualification. Such assumptions lead to false conclusions and impede the natural contextual exegesis.

<sup>344</sup> “The people of God in history go back to Abraham” (ibid., 189).

<sup>345</sup> Ibid. For Wright, the Exodus is a model for God’s redemption, the “prime lens through which we see the biblical mission of God,” while the Jubilee is presented as God’s model of restoration: release/liberty, and return/restoration (ibid., 275). He misses the centrifugal aspect of the Exodus.

<sup>346</sup> Ibid., 196ff.

the psalmist talks about eschatological expectations, but admits realized eschatology is also included. The identity of Israel is merged with that of Egypt and Assyria as in Isa 19:24-25 and they are described as a blessing on the earth. Wright recognizes this passage as one of the missiologically most significant texts in the Old Testament and links it to the inherent universality that is programmed into the genes of Israel.<sup>347</sup>

God's covenant with Israel is presented as one of the core themes of Old Testament theology, and of Israel's theological self-understanding. Wright indicates that the sequence of covenants is the best way to progress through the historical narrative of the Old Testament which "also provides a major clue to its significance and eventual outcome."<sup>348</sup> However, he considers that the chain of covenants starts with Noah ("the first explicit reference to covenant-making in the biblical text"), because of the universality in the Noachic covenant that includes humans but also all Creation.<sup>349</sup>

Wright considers the covenants in the Old Testament as eschatological and developing in a trajectory that "leads to the missionally charged language of fulfillment in the NT." Because of this eschatological view, even the Noahic covenant is "harnessed to the certainty of God's promise of future blessing for his people, in Is 54:7-10."<sup>350</sup>

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<sup>347</sup> Ibid., 236.

<sup>348</sup> Ibid., 326.

<sup>349</sup> It is strange that Wright, although he recognizes the universality of the covenant with Noah, does not go back to the original covenant at creation of which the covenant with Noah is simply a repetition. By not doing so, Wright also misses the covenant in Gen 3:15 and believes that the Sinai covenant and God's covenant with David are practically the same covenant adapted to new circumstances. Certain presuppositions in covenant theology make scholars focus on the Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic covenants and they not only miss the significance of the other covenants but also miss the comprehensive picture of the divine covenant.

<sup>350</sup> Ibid., 351.

Concluding, the author finds that “the mission of God is as integral to the sequence of the covenants as they are to the overarching grand narrative of the whole Bible.”<sup>351</sup>

At the end of the book, the author goes back to the discussion about the nations. He notices that the nations are always present in the biblical story, sometimes being the focus of God’s attention, other times being in the background. However, he believes that the nations appear only after the Flood. Wright includes the nations in both the created realm and redeemed realm. They receive blessings, but also stand under judgment. Sometimes God uses the nations as agents of judgment, and recipients of mercy.<sup>352</sup>

Wright takes the book of Jonah (who has only a “semblance” of a missionary) as an example of God extending his forgiveness and mercy to the nations. The emphasis is on God, the greatest missionary, and on his character. He concludes that “God’s mission is to bless all the nations of the earth. . . . There is no favoritism in God’s dealings with Israel and the nations.”<sup>353</sup> At the same time, Wright indicates that, although they are not at the forefront of the biblical account, the nations are under God’s care and control.<sup>354</sup>

Wright prefers to think that the way Israel is supposed to fulfill its duty “remains a mystery.”<sup>355</sup> In the end, the nations will share Israel’s identity, while ethnical and

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<sup>351</sup> Ibid., 356.

<sup>352</sup> “If God could use Israel as the agent of his judgment on wicked nations, he could readily apply the same principle in reverse to Israel itself” (ibid., 459).

<sup>353</sup> Ibid., 462.

<sup>354</sup> Note how the author applies the covenant to the nations. The covenant implies a two-way relationship: You are mine, I am your God. In this light the other nations simply belong to God, but they don’t know God. There is no covenant reciprocity involved. However, by punishing Israel, God demonstrates that he is sovereign, not like other gods who can be manipulated by people.

<sup>355</sup> Ibid., 478.

geographical boundaries will be removed. “The very name ‘Israel’ will be extended and refined.” They would belong to YHWH only if they join Israel.<sup>356</sup>

Concluding the book, Wright finds that the centrifugal dynamic of the early Christians “was indeed something remarkably new in practice if not in concept. . . . There is no clear mandate in God’s revelation to Israel over the centuries for them to undertake ‘missions,’ in our sense of the word, to the nations.”<sup>357</sup> Any centrifugal mission in the Old Testament is declared “eschatological.”<sup>358</sup> For Wright, Israel was simply supposed to be, not to go anywhere. “The only concept of mission into which God fits is the one of which he is the beginning, the center and the end.”<sup>359</sup>

### Synopsis

The literature review in this chapter revealed a variety of opinions and conclusions expressed by the authors surveyed. A development of hermeneutical awareness has been noted, although most authors claim their contradictory assumptions are all biblical. Five main areas seem to present the largest diversity of opinions: the

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<sup>356</sup> Wright’s insistence on the centripetal coming of the nations at Jerusalem seems to be based on the assumption that at the end Jerusalem and the temple will be rebuilt and the nations will gather there. He limits the reading of the Old Testament stating that the “focus here is not on all texts that refer in any way to YHWH and the nations but on those that articulate some element of universality, either directly or implicitly echoing the Abraham promise” (ibid., 223).

<sup>357</sup> “If YHWH’s intention had been that they were to organize missions to the nations, instructions to that effect would surely have been framed. But we find none” (ibid., 502, 503).

<sup>358</sup> “Only in Isaiah 66 is there explicit word of God sending messengers to the nations, and that is as a future expectation contingent on the ingathering of Israel first. . . . When we turn the page from Malachi to Matthew, however, we have landed in a totally different world. We find the same understanding of God’s ultimate mission to the nations that we have seen breathing so pervasively through the Old Testament. But we now also find that it has been transformed from what Schnabel calls a missionary *idea* into energetic missionary *praxis*” (ibid., 503, 505).

<sup>359</sup> Ibid., 534.



definition of mission, the relationship between the Testaments and the unity of the Bible, universalism and particularism, the point of departure in mission theology, and the dynamics between centrifugal and centripetal mission. The following positions (and the corresponding authors) have been noted for each area:

*Definition of Mission.* The problem starts with the way mission is defined and understood. One finds mission described as exclusively God's cosmic attribute or dimension, *missio Dei* (Peters), or as the action of sending (Senior and StuhlmueLLer; DuBose), while other authors believe mission is people's duty to join in God's mission (Rowley; Okoye).

Mission was sometimes described as the bridge between universalism and particularism (Carver), and other times as being completely different from universalism (DuBose). In certain theologies mission requires openness to God's variation in history, *Heilsgeschichte* (Martin-Achard; Blauw; Peters; Bauckham), while in others its Trinitarian aspect is emphasized (Carver; Peters). The variety of mission definitions continues with the glory of God (De Ridder), a hermeneutical key to understanding the Bible in the shape of an "envelope" (Kaiser), and even violence and conquest are considered mission (Carver; Senior and StuhlmueLLer). Francis DuBose concludes that, although the Scriptures are considered verbally inspired and used extensively, local contexts play the major role in defining mission. In order to defend the assumptions, "The [traditional] approach has been essentially proof texting without a clear, consistent hermeneutic."<sup>360</sup> The preferred assumptions even led certain theologians to declare that the Bible does not define mission at all (Köstenberger and O'Brien).

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<sup>360</sup> DuBose, *God Who Sends*, 16.

*The Unity of the Bible and the Relationship between Testaments.* Although most authors claim to see the Bible as a unit, there is an array of understandings behind such a statement. For conservative evangelical authors, the Scripture is inerrant and prescriptive of mission (Peters; Filbeck). Other theologians see the Bible as descriptive of mission or the result of it (DuBose). There are still authors who believe that the New Testament is superior to the Old and use the New Testament as an interpretive lens for the Old (Peters; Senior and StuhlmueLLer; Bosch; Filbeck; Glasser; Wright) because they believe there was no real gospel before the cross (Peters), or because the Old Testament is incomplete (Rowley; Glasser). Some scholars believe there is a progression in Israel's understanding of mission in the Old Testament (Rowley; Rétif and Lamarche; Peters; Filbeck; Glasser), while others insist there was no such development and see the Great Commission as being the inauguration of a completely new era of mission (Wright). There are authors who believe Israel had a missionary role (Beeby, Wright), while others deny it, insisting that only the New Testament church had such a missionary purpose and nature (Blauw).

Different assumptions lead scholars to see unity and continuity between the Testaments (Senior and StuhlmueLLer; DuBose), others see complementarity (Legrand) or discontinuity (Bauckham; Glasser). Certain authors believe that there is a gap between the Old Testament's idealism and the actual life of Israel (Peters), while others consider that the Old Testament contains the explicit model of mission entrusted to Israel (Kaiser). There are those who claim that the Bible reveals a dynamic unity (Beeby), while others insist that there are clear distinctions that need to be preserved in order to be faithful to God's revelation (Bosch). There are also people who believe the Bible includes the deuterocanonical books, in addition to the canonical ones (Okoye).

*The Tensions between Universalism and Particularism (election).* Israel is generally presented as the chosen one, singled out among the nations. But there are those who claim that the Old Testament presents a sweeping universalism that includes other nations as well (Blauw; De Ridder). Between the extremely exclusivistic particularism and uncritical universality, one can discover nuances such as a surviving particularism, necessary during the Babylonian exile (Rowley); an inclusivistic particularism that allowed helping other nations, but salvation remained only through Israel (Goerner); an election for service by covenant (Senior and Stuhlmuehler); God's universalism (Bosch); and a difference between universalism and universality (Peters).

Universalism and particularism (election) are usually seen in tension (Rétif and Lamarche; Okoye), while others present them in balance (Legrand; Wright). There are those who insist election does not imply mission (Martin-Achard; Okoye), but others claim that universalism is also different from mission—one requires conversion, the other not (Martin-Achard; Blauw; DuBose; Bauckham). The same difference is applied to universality (no sending) and mission (sending) (Peters). There are theologians who say that the Old Testament's universalism is fulfilled only in the New Testament (Peters), while others believe that election is the binding factor that unites the two Testaments (De Ridder). The presuppositions allow certain scholars to see a passive universalism in the Old Testament (Okoye; Wright), while others argue for a sending universalism (Kaiser). And, certainly, there are those who argue for a progressive movement from particular to universal, and from one to many (Bauckham).

*Mission Theology Points of Departure.* Different hermeneutical assumptions also have an impact on the various points of departure chosen for mission in the Old

Testament. Most authors believe that Gen 12 is the beginning of God's missionary model (Legrand; Filbeck; Beeby; Bauckham; Wright). For others, the covenant with Noah is a better choice (Glasser), while for some authors God's mission began in Gen 3 after the Fall (DuBose). There are those who believe that the Exodus is God's true missionary model (Burnett; Wright), and thus Moses is the first missionary (Glasser; Okoye). A few indicate that God's mission began in Gen 1 at Creation (Burnett; Köstenberger and O'Brien), while others suggest that God's mission started even before Creation (Köstenberger and O'Brien).

*The Centrifugal-Centripetal Mission Balance.* In terms of centrifugal vs. centripetal mission, opinions range from no mission for Israel in the Old Testament (Bosch), to a completely centripetal mission (Peters; Köstenberger and O'Brien; Bauckham; Wright), to a progressive understanding of mission (De Ridder), to an introductory phase to the New Testament's mission (Goerner), to a position of tension between centripetal and centrifugal mission that appears in completely different passages and contexts of the Old Testament (Filbeck; Okoye), to a balance between the two (DuBose; Legrand; Burnett; Kaiser), and finally to a centrifugal mission planned by God but which Israel failed to implement (Peters).

Certain presuppositions require that Israel was simply supposed to exist (Martin-Achard), to be present (Wright), to be an ethical model (Carver), or was not expected to go anywhere in a centrifugal sense (Rowley; Blauw; Peters; Köstenberger and O'Brien; Bauckham; Wright). For some, the Old Testament is not even a Christian book, and its meaning is incomplete (Blauw; Köstenberger and O'Brien; Glasser). Others interpret the centrifugal passages found in the Old Testament as eschatological prophecies, never

intended to be fulfilled by Israel (Martin-Achard; Blauw; Köstenberger and O'Brien; Glasser; Wright). Most scholars conclude that God intended two different and separate phases of mission, a centripetal one for Israel in the Old Testament, and a centrifugal mission for the church in the New Testament (Bosch; Köstenberger and O'Brien; Bauckham; Wright). Very few accept that there are centrifugal currents in the Old Testament, for the momentum is still overwhelmingly centripetal (Senior and Stuhlmuehler).

Hermeneutical presuppositions lead authors to accept the Old Testament as missionary, claiming it has its own missionary interpretation, different from the New (De Ridder; Filbeck). On the other hand, theologians believe that the New Testament's mission cannot be understood without the Old Testament; however, they do not take the Old as containing a valid model for mission, treating it only as a background for the New Testament's mission (Burnett; Bauckham; Glasser). Such a view insists that the New Testament decides the validity of the Old Testament's mission (Bosch). There are also those who believe that centrifugal mission was implicit in the Old Testament, but explicit in the New (Filbeck). Some blame Israel for losing interest in centrifugal mission (Filbeck), while others consider the whole centrifugal-centripetal model a failure for the unity of Scripture (DuBose).

## **Conclusion**

This survey of the main literature related to mission theology in the Old Testament reveals a large variety of hermeneutical assumptions influenced by the missionary praxis of the day or by the trends in the field of Old Testament theology. If by the beginning of the twentieth century people looked for biblical arguments to support

their triumphalistic understanding of mission, today there is less confidence in the missionary undertaking and a diversification of missionary approaches. Mission theology seems to depend on the assumptions of each author.

The very definition of mission varies based on context and assumptions. If at the beginning of the twentieth century mission clearly meant going out in a centrifugal direction, it gradually shifted towards a centripetal meaning when the colonial era ended and the “missionaries, go home!” message was heard. The Old Testament, which had not been seen as having much missiological value, suddenly became the source from which to find new paradigms and meanings for mission in today’s context. There was movement from a position of “no mission” in the Old Testament to the point where most theologians admit only a centripetal direction. Very few accept that centrifugal mission has anything to do with the Old Testament.

In spite of such changes, the basic assumptions are still present influencing the way theologians read the Bible. Hermeneutics that divide and separate the Scriptures are still alive and well today. Most writers still consider Gen 1-11 as separated from the rest of mission in the Bible or the Old Testament, although some have started to see value in those first chapters of Scripture. The centrifugal-centripetal approach is still used to separate the two Testaments in terms of mission. By employing such assumptions the unity of the Bible is denied and the theology produced results in faulty conclusions.

The next chapters will discuss some of the major hermeneutical issues noticed in this survey and propose corrections and solutions for a hermeneutic that preserves the unity of Scripture and also the unity of God’s character and his mission.

## CHAPTER 3

### AN ANALYSIS OF THEOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS THAT INFLUENCE MISSION THEOLOGY

Mission theology is not an easy field, especially in the Old Testament. Each theologian works with a particular set of assumptions that usually lie hidden behind the conclusions. Mission theology is defined as “those theological presuppositions, statements, and principles which critically reflect upon and explicate God’s purpose for the church in relation to the world.”<sup>1</sup> The text of the Old Testament is interpreted according to the assumptions and the result is a large array of opinions that contradict each other and distort the text in order to support the predetermined conclusions.<sup>2</sup>

This chapter analyzes some of the widespread popular assumptions behind mission theology, and their impact on the definition of mission, on the unity of Scripture, on the balance between universalism and election, on the centripetal-centrifugal mission continuum, as well as on the points of departure in mission theology.

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<sup>1</sup> Rodger C. Bassham, *Mission Theology, 1948-1975: Years of Worldwide Creative Tension—Ecumenical, Evangelical, and Roman Catholic* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1979), 7.

<sup>2</sup> For a detailed historical and theological development of mission theology and the different assumptions attached, see Charles Van Engen, “Theology of Mission,” *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, ed. Scott A. Moreau, Harold A. Netland, Charles Edward Van Engen, and David Burnett (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000), 949-951; J. A. B. Jongeneel, “Mission Theology in the Twentieth Century,” *Dictionary of Mission Theology: Evangelical Foundations*, ed. John Corrie, Samuel Escobar, and Wilbert R. Shenk (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007), 237-244; Van Engen, *Mission on the Way*, 127-144.

The difficulty of reading the Old Testament in its own right is clearly seen in the missiological works analyzed in the previous chapter. Although the end of the twentieth century saw a new interest in the Old Testament, that difficulty has not disappeared but rather has increased. Religious and confessional traditions play a huge role in the way the Old Testament is approached. Different approaches used to identify the kind of mission found there include everything from a backward reading of the Old Testament with a New Testament hermeneutic to a complete disregard of the Old Testament in terms of mission, to an evolutionary reading of the same Testament, all assuming certain presuppositions that inform each approach. But what are those presuppositions that are responsible for such a variety of views on mission theology in the Old Testament and what is their impact?

### *Missio Dei*

Today, the general agreement seems to be that *missio Dei* is the root of all mission in Scripture.<sup>3</sup> Although the term is found in every mission theology, there is no unified understanding of what *missio Dei* is or what it implies. As J. Andrew Kirk has observed, “Legitimately and illegitimately the *missio Dei* has been used to advance all kinds of missiological agendas.”<sup>4</sup> The very term, *missio Dei*, has a problematic history. The

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<sup>3</sup> As Herbert Kane expresses it, “from first to last the Christian mission is God’s mission, not man’s. It originated in the heart of God. It is based on the love of God. It is determined by the will of God. Its mandate was enunciated by the Son of God. Its rationale was explained in the Word of God. For its ultimate success it is dependent on the power of God (*Understanding Christian Missions* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1978], 87).

<sup>4</sup> Andrew Kirk, *What Is Mission? Theological Explorations* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2000), 25. He concludes that “perhaps the *missio Dei* is rather too easily taken for granted. In this sense, it has become more of a slogan than a defining phrase. A careful investigation of its meaning should begin . . . by looking at the assumptions that have to be in place if it is going to act as more than a topical catch phrase or rallying cry” (ibid.).



concept started to be crafted at the demise of the Colonial mission era, and was widely embraced by ecumenical theology.<sup>5</sup> Thus, the responsibility for mission was no longer seen as a simple human response or obedience towards the Great Commission, but belonged to the Trinitarian God. Christian missionaries were no longer able to work in politically independent countries, and their conscience was thus liberated by placing the responsibility on God's shoulders. The meaning of mission was no longer just the preaching of the gospel by evangelistic methods, but included social and economical involvement.<sup>6</sup> As a result, the meaning of the term *mission* itself has changed together with the new theology.<sup>7</sup>

Several authors admit that their understanding of mission and mission theology depends heavily on the particular hermeneutic employed. Browsing through different approaches, from the idea of "sending" and "universalism," to salvation, evangelism, service, dialogue with those of other faiths, and even the liberation movements, Francis DuBose notices that, more and more, local contexts define mission. Although the Scriptures are considered verbally inspired and used extensively, "the [traditional] approach has been essentially proof texting without a clear, consistent hermeneutic."<sup>8</sup> Thus, the assumptions behind the hermeneutic become crucial.

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<sup>5</sup> John A. McIntosh, "Missio Dei," *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, ed. Moreau et al., 631-633; L. Pachau, "Missio Dei," *Dictionary of Mission Theology: Evangelical Foundations*, ed. Corrie et al., 232-234.

<sup>6</sup> See Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 389-393.

<sup>7</sup> See Francis Anekwe Oborji, *Concepts of Mission: The Evolution of Contemporary Missiology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2006), 3-40; Glasser and McGavran, *Contemporary Theologies of Mission*, 7-29; also John P. Dickson, *Mission-Commitment in Ancient Judaism and in the Pauline Communities* (Tübingen, Germany: J. C. B. Mohr, 2003), 7-10.

<sup>8</sup> DuBose, *God Who Sends*, 16.

## Presuppositions

As noticed, the problem is not with the biblical text but with the presuppositions with which the text is read. A solid hermeneutic is based on presuppositions that come from the biblical text rather than from a particular confessional background. Justifying his own hermeneutic, James Chuckwuma Okoye recognizes that “divergent faith perspectives may be a factor in the divergence of interpretations.”<sup>9</sup> This aspect is commonly forgotten in studies on justifying mission. Although recent mission theologies go beyond merely looking for a rationale for mission and emphasize the need for a missional hermeneutic or missional reading of the whole Bible,<sup>10</sup> their proposed solutions are unfortunately still loaded with extra-biblical presuppositions.

One of the main problems is that missiologists tend to look at the Old Testament with the same lenses used when looking at the New Testament, trying to find New Testament themes and patterns in the Old. Using the assumption that mission is centrifugal, they conclude there is little evidence of Israel going out to the nations in a centrifugal way. For some this means there is no mission in the Old Testament. However, almost no one takes time to verify whether the assumptions they are working with are based on the whole Bible.

For example, Christopher Wright concludes that the Old Testament contains “the roots” of mission while in the New Testament one finds the “development, fulfillment or

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<sup>9</sup> Okoye, *Israel and the Nations*, 16.

<sup>10</sup> Such an approach is proposed by Walter Kaiser Jr., John Goldingay, Christopher Wright, and Chukumwa Okoye,. Although these authors recognize the need to respect the principle of the unity of the Bible, it is difficult for them to completely abandon their presuppositions.

extension” of mission.<sup>11</sup> He also believes that there should be a messianic reading of Scripture up to Christ and a missional reading from Christ on, applying two types of hermeneutics to the Scriptures.<sup>12</sup> This view assumes *a priori* that the New Testament is superior to the Old. Wright admits he cannot read the Old Testament without bringing in his Christian view, reading it “in submission to Christ.”<sup>13</sup> There is nothing wrong with such a reading unless one discovers that a careful reading of the New Testament reveals that Paul and the disciples understand their centrifugal mission based on Old Testament passages and prophecies.<sup>14</sup> How did the Old Testament people understand mission? Could they blame a lack of an “in submission to Christ” hermeneutic for not being a blessing for the nations and a light in the darkness?

Kaiser, however, notices an innate link between the mission of the two Testaments in the biblical text. “The apostle [Paul] never viewed his mission to be something that was brand-new and unattached to what God has been doing in the past or what he wanted to continue to do in the present.”<sup>15</sup> Even Jesus introduced his mission with Old Testament passages (Luke 4:16-30), while “the Jews of Jesus’ day would have linked his action and sending with the OT word.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God*, 18.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>14</sup> Acts 13:46-48; 15:13-21; 24:14; 28:23-28; Rom 15:8-12.

<sup>15</sup> Kaiser, *Mission in the Old Testament*, 75.

<sup>16</sup> Ferris L. McDaniel, “Mission in the Old Testament,” in *Mission in the New Testament: An Evangelical Approach*, ed. William J. Larkin Jr. and Joel F. Williams (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1998), 12.

## Thematic Approaches

One trend in the scholarly community has been to look for an overarching or underlying theme or a key word that would explain the missionary endeavors in the Bible. The idea of *blessing* is seen by some as the basis for mission;<sup>17</sup> others consider *promise and fulfillment* as key,<sup>18</sup> while others see the *covenant* as an overarching theme that motivates God's and Israel's mission.<sup>19</sup> These themes coincide with the centers proposed in Old Testament theology.

However, each solution presents its own problems. For example, the Bible contains many covenants, in particular the Old and the New Covenant which are interpreted today to be opposite in nature or assigned to the two Testaments. Which covenant is the basis for mission? Do we end up with different types of mission based on different covenants?

The blessing as a key missionary concept is based on God's covenant with Abraham in Gen 12, but that leaves the first eleven chapters in Genesis as problematic, with some scholars concluding that God failed in his mission during the "primeval" period. This approach also leaves certain specific actions commissioned by God outside the umbrella of blessing.

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<sup>17</sup> See Johannes Christiaan Hoekendijk, *The Church Inside Out* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1966).

<sup>18</sup> See Walter Kaiser, *The Promise-Plan of God: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008). Paul House notes that Kaiser's approach does not have "the breadth needed to cover Old Testament theology as a whole" (*Old Testament Theology*, 41).

<sup>19</sup> See Van Engen, *Mission on the Way*, 75-83.

The third theme proposed, promise and fulfillment, treats the Old Testament simply as preparatory for the New, incomplete, and inferior to the “better” Testament. While the idea of a thematic approach is excellent, the themes proposed are less than satisfactory.

### **The Centrifugal-Centripetal Model**

One of the models used to explain mission in the Bible is the centrifugal-centripetal continuum. The term has its origins in physics and, unfortunately, some missiologists uncritically apply this model to mission.<sup>20</sup>

The main problem of the hermeneutic attached to the centrifugal-centripetal model seems to come from the different understandings of the term *mission*. For those who understand it in the New Testament “Great Commission” sense the term “missionary” is loaded with a centrifugal meaning. From such a hermeneutical perspective, the Old Testament does not seem to contain a Great Commission identical to Matt 28:18-20.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> For example, Doug Matacio applies the “center-seeking” (centripetal) and center-fleeing” (centrifugal) mission to a different center: sin. Centripetal mission becomes “fleeing God in favor of man's own way,” and receives a negative connotation. However, when missionaries go centripetally they “take the center with them” without fleeing from God. The argument for a lack of centrifugal mission in the Old Testament seems to be the “incompleteness” based on the fact that Jesus has not died and resurrected, and the way of salvation “had not actually been accomplished yet.” Based on a variant of this physical model, “the centrifugal force is the absence of the centripetal one.” Matacio correctly observes that centripetal mission is present and necessary in the New Testament, but applies an imbalanced model to the Old Testament based on certain presuppositions. He ends with the question, “Why go all the way to Madagascar if Christ hasn't actually died for their sins yet?” (Doug Matacio, e-mail message to author, 26 June 2008. See also his article “Centripetal and ‘Centrifugal’ Mission: Solomon and Jesus,” *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies* 4, no. 1 [2008]: 31-42).

<sup>21</sup> However, Kaiser indicates that Gen 15:2, 8 is a charter for mission similar to Matt 28:18-20, and that Gen 12:1-3 is the first “Great Commission” in the Bible (*Mission in the Old Testament*, 7, 26-27).

Israel's history per se shows very little in terms of missionary encounters with the nations. Harris notices that, for some, mission means attracting by a ministry of presence while others understand it in a more evangelistic, active sense. He identifies the real implications when he states that "this is not so much a difference between 'active' and 'passive' modes of mission: it is the difference between two alternative theologies of mission."<sup>22</sup>

Based on an active definition of mission there is no voluntary going out to the nations in the Old Testament. Israel is to expect other nations to come to Jerusalem to learn about God. When the definition of mission is informed by the New Testament, Israel is no longer considered a missionary nation but only has a missionary role. The conclusion comes as no surprise: "Israel was not mandated by God to send missionaries to the nations."<sup>23</sup> The assumption is that without a centrifugal aspect there is no "real" mission in the Old Testament. Wright even prefers the term "missional" because it allows the reader to pour his/her own meaning into whatever "missional" is.<sup>24</sup> The justification for using a slightly different term is based on a common presupposition—an old and a new covenant, and an Old Testament type of mission versus a New Testament type.<sup>25</sup>

It is also very informative to analyze the assumptions with which people read even the New Testament. James Brownson assumes that his hermeneutic is missional

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<sup>22</sup> Geoffrey R. Harris, *Mission in the Gospels* (London: Epworth, 2004), 30-31.

<sup>23</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God*, 24.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 17, 22, 25, 29, 32.

<sup>25</sup> Wright claims that "the New Testament was born out of a hermeneutical revolution in reading those Scriptures we now call the Old Testament. And within the early church itself there were different ways of handling those same Scriptures, depending on the context and need being addressed" (*ibid.*, 38-39).

because he argues that the early church was a movement with a “specifically missionary character.”<sup>26</sup> However, he overlooks a historical fact: the early Christian church left Jerusalem only when it was forced out by persecution and for a long time had serious problems accepting gentiles among Jewish believers.

Brownson moves on and develops a missional hermeneutic based on his particular understanding of the New Testament. He does not mention anything about the Old Testament as though mission was born after Jesus went to his Father. Was that “missionary character” missing in the Old Testament? Such a lens applied to the Old Testament is inappropriate and produces invalid conclusions. Developing a model of biblical interpretation based on unbalanced assumptions raises more doubts and questions than solid answers.

In spite of such unbalanced generalizations, one can find different approaches. Donald Senior and Carroll Stuhlmueller admit they started with the assumption that “the movement of Israel’s history and its Scriptures appears to be centripetal, or inward.” However, they discovered that

a careful analysis of biblical tradition uncovers powerful currents that swirl in the opposite direction. Even though Israel treasured its identity as God’s elect people, at its best moments it recognized other signs of deep solidarity with the nonelect nations and with the dynamics of secular history outside the annals of its covenant. . . . Thus a scan of Jewish history in the Old Testament reveals a dialectic between centripetal and centrifugal forces, between flight from the secular and absorption of the secular, between a concern for self-identity and responsible interaction with one’s environment, between elect status as God’s

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<sup>26</sup> James Brownson is quoted in *The Church Between Gospel and Culture: The Emerging Mission in North America*, ed. George R. Hunsberger and Craig Van Gelder (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 232.

chosen people and humble awareness of one's solidarity with the entire human family.<sup>27</sup>

Writing about the centrifugal message of mission in the Bible, Walter Kaiser notices that the concern for the nations is present both in Genesis and Revelation, the first and last books of the Bible. As a result he concludes that the theme of a mission to the whole world frames the whole Bible.<sup>28</sup> Kaiser improves the centrifugal-centripetal model by attaching intentionality to each movement, thus explaining the Babylonian and Assyrian exiles as involuntary centrifugal mission.<sup>29</sup>

Although using mission as *sending*, DuBose concludes that centrifugal mission exists in the Old Testament. He points to the fact that mission in its sending form is both *explicit* and *implicit* in the whole of Scripture. This helps him to explain the lack of an explicit "Great Commission" in the Old Testament. Because in verbal form ("go," "come") the concept of sending is widespread in the Old Testament and has a special theological significance, DuBose concludes that "the concept of the sending is inherent in the biblical understanding of knowledge."<sup>30</sup>

Affirming the unity and continuity of the two Testaments, Arthur Glasser emphasizes the need for hermeneutical coherence. He states that "although the Old Testament is the Word of God primarily to Israel, its value does not lie in the way it

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<sup>27</sup> Senior and Stuhlmueller, *The Biblical Foundations for Mission*, 315-316. They allow centrifugal mission in the Old Testament, but not at the same level as centripetal mission.

<sup>28</sup> Kaiser, *Mission in the Old Testament*, 7. This perspective comes clearly out of the text.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>30</sup> "The chief significance of the language of the sending is in the fact that this language of sending is necessary to convey explicitly the theological ideas which are inherent in the biblical message" (DuBose, *God Who Sends*, 55, 72). If these ideas are not properly expressed, they would be forced under inappropriate terminology and concepts.



anticipates the New Testament's announcement of the Messiah of Israel and the Savior of the world. It is in fact revelation in the same sense as the New Testament, for it reveals the mighty acts and gracious purposes of God on behalf of his people and the world he created for them. Both testaments are organically related in a dynamic and interactive relationship."<sup>31</sup> Based on such an approach, one should be able to identify both centrifugal and centripetal mission in both Testaments.

The survey of literature in the previous chapter clearly reveals that presuppositions play a very important role in discovering the missionary model of the Old Testament. The assumptions of a centrifugal-only definition of mission might also distort the reading of the text and the findings. Imposing a certain framework on the text tends to control it without allowing the text to speak for itself. Wright is candid to admit that "in searching the Scriptures for a biblical foundation for mission, we are likely to find what we brought with us—our own conception of mission, now festooned with biblical luggage tags."<sup>32</sup>

If the Bible is going to be read missiologically, one has to allow the text to speak for itself without imposing extra-biblical presuppositions on it. The text itself should define God's and our mission theology. If centrifugal mission surfaces in the Old Testament, one should be careful not to ignore it. Legrand's advice is vital: "A study on mission in the Bible must not be an attempt to justify a personal approach or the positions of Vatican II or liberation theology or any other theology. It must be listening."<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Glasser, *Announcing the Kingdom*, 17.

<sup>32</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God*, 37.

<sup>33</sup> Legrand, *Unity and Plurality*, xiii.

## The Unity of the Bible

A major assumption affecting the centrifugal-centripetal model is the relationship of the Testaments and the unity of the Bible. David L. Baker shows that the unity of the Bible has always been a point of contention between authors and scholars.<sup>34</sup> However, Daniel Fuller argues that “this idea of the Bible’s unity is not a concept which is imposed upon the Bible because of the dogmatic assertion that it is verbally inspired. To the contrary, it is inherent in the Bible, for the Bible declares itself to be the Word of God.”<sup>35</sup> After comparing the writings of the first authors in the Bible with the last messages in it, Fuller states that “there is good evidence of its unity, consisting in the steps God takes in carrying out his plan for the world.”<sup>36</sup>

Although the early church believed in the unity of Scripture, the Jewish-Christian tensions reflected on how the Testaments were perceived and soon the New Testament was attributed to the Christian church while the Old Testament was relegated to the Jewish community. Not long afterwards, Marcion of Sinope completely eliminated the Old Testament as well as some parts of the New Testament as being authoritative Scripture. However, the church rejected Marcion’s position and reacted against his radical stance, but the balance of the Scripture was not regained.

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<sup>34</sup> In his book, *Two Testaments, One Bible*, David Baker goes through the history of the interpretation of the relationship between the Old and New Testaments, proposing several solutions to preserve its natural unity (David L. Baker, *Two Testaments, One Bible* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1991], 257-270).

<sup>35</sup> Daniel P. Fuller, “The Hermeneutics of Dispensationalism” (Th.D. dissertation, Northern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1957), 180.

<sup>36</sup> Daniel P. Fuller, *The Unity of the Bible: Unfolding God’s Plan for Humanity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 28.

The Middle Ages noticed a slightly altered position, with the New Testament being considered perfect, while the Old Testament was imperfect. The mission of the Church took the shape of crusades. Although the main issue of the Reformation was the return to the authority and role of the Bible, the belief in the superiority of the New Testament did not disappear. For example, Luther assigned grace to the New Testament, while the Law belonged to the Old Testament. The Council of Trent complicated the issues by adding the written tradition into the equation of the authority of the canon.

Historical criticism widened the gap between the Testaments on a historical rather than a theological basis: the Old Testament belonged to God the Father and contained the history of theocracy while the New Testament was the time of Jesus Christ. The two-gods concept proposed by Marcion returned under a different umbrella.

Baker suggests that the idea of evolution penetrated theology under the developmental approach to the Testaments.<sup>37</sup> The concept of “progressive revelation” was born and became accepted as normative for covenant theologians. Although the Old Testament contained indispensable and permanently valid truth, it was considered only the “essential preparation” for the New Testament which was “better.”<sup>38</sup>

Baker concurs with other scholars that the Old Testament is incomplete and looks forward to an outside act of God for completion which will be analogous to similar acts

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<sup>37</sup> Baker, *Two Testaments, One Bible*, 46-47.

<sup>38</sup> Rowley explains that “Christ and His work are not separate and distinct, for in His work He Himself, and in Him God, stood supremely unveiled. It was Christ crucified Who laid bare to mortal eye the heart of God; it was Christ crucified Who wrought redemption for man. And for both of these sides of His ministry, alike reaching their climax in the one moment of His death, the Old Testament provided the essential preparation” (H. H. Rowley, *The Relevance of the Bible* [New York: Macmillan, 1944], 79). There is almost no discussion about the relationship between the degrading of humanity and the progression of revelation.

of God in the past but even more comprehensive and radically different. He recognizes the unresolved tensions at the end of the Old Testament period, especially tensions between the universal missionary concern and the Jewish exclusivistic particularism expressed through election. The author notes the tension between “divine sovereignty and human responsibility: probably all the Old Testament authors are convinced of God’s ultimate sovereignty over creation and history, but in practice it often seems that the divine purpose and will remain unfulfilled because of human sin and rebellion.”<sup>39</sup>

According to Rodney Petersen, although historically the Bible was seen as a unity, the relationship between the Testaments can be classified in four categories: (1) the Old Testament is simply history and there is no guidance for the New Testament Christian, with each ethnic group having a different way of salvation; (2) the Old Testament can be understood only if it is read through the lens of the New Testament, with the Jews attributed a privileged role; (3) the Old Testament has its own theological integrity, and includes information for salvation for everyone, not just the Jews; and (4) the Old Testament can be considered only an allegory or symbol of the New Testament, containing only myths and fables of other cultures.<sup>40</sup>

Petersen suggests that whichever position one adopts, there is a progress in revelation, with Jesus Christ being the apex of religious truth. However, he recognizes that eschatology has a lot to do with how this progress is viewed and understood. Some emphasize the horizontal time-line where one gets closer to God towards the end of

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<sup>39</sup> Baker, *Two Testaments, One Bible*, 26.

<sup>40</sup> Rodney Petersen, “Continuity and Discontinuity: The Debate throughout Church History,” in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship between the Old and New Testaments*, ed. John S. Feinberg (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1988), 33-34.

historical time, while others accept a vertical relationship with God any time in history.

Petersen proposes that these two approaches do not need to be exclusive. He believes that the answer to these positions will be clarified as the church strives to fulfill the missiological mandate, although “few groups are consistent in their handling of these issues. The Bible, the book that unites the church, frequently divides it.”<sup>41</sup>

John S. Feinberg rejects the continuity of the Testaments, claiming that there is much apparent discontinuity in each Testament. He speaks about the many Old and New Testament theologies, rejects any single unified theology of each testament, and denies a unified theology of the whole Bible.<sup>42</sup> Paul D. Feinberg concurs, insisting that one should not focus on continuity because the Bible does not require uniformity of the Testaments.<sup>43</sup> On the other hand, O. Palmer Robertson argues for the need to keep continuity and discontinuity in balance.<sup>44</sup> The same solution is envisioned by David Baker who indicates that since we ended up with two Testaments, we need to find ways of living with this reality. He points to the fact that “the two Testaments form one Bible, and to properly understand either one of the Testaments it is necessary to do so in relation to the other. Like Siamese twins, they are so closely linked together that separation is impossible without damage to both.”<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Petersen, “Continuity and Discontinuity,” 34.

<sup>42</sup> John S. Feinberg, “Systems of Discontinuity,” in John S. Feinberg, ed., *Continuity and Discontinuity*, 63.

<sup>43</sup> Paul D. Feinberg, “Hermeneutics of Discontinuity,” in Feinberg, *Continuity and Discontinuity*, 128.

<sup>44</sup> O. Palmer Robertson, “Hermeneutics of Continuity,” in Feinberg, *Continuity and Discontinuity*, 94.

<sup>45</sup> Baker, *Two Testaments, One Bible*, 261.

Baker proposes that in addition to Christ as the unifier of the Scripture and salvation history as the divine revelation present during all eras of biblical history and the main concern of all biblical books,<sup>46</sup> three key themes offer solutions for the relationship between the Testaments: typology,<sup>47</sup> promise and fulfillment,<sup>48</sup> and continuity and discontinuity.<sup>49</sup> He considers that the basic promise is found in Gen 12:1-3 (repeated in Gen 13, 15, and 17) and consists of three elements (also found in the promise to David and in the prophets): a land, descendants (a great nation), and a relationship with God

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<sup>46</sup> “It is creation rather than salvation which is the ultimate goal of God’s activity according to the Bible. We were not created to be saved, but are saved in order to become what we were originally intended to be. . . . To say that salvation is the dominant theme of the Bible is not to say that it is of greater ultimate importance than creation, but simply that it is the immediate problem which confronts mankind and which is dealt with at length in the Bible. Moreover, the problem is not dealt with in an abstract or mystical way, but by words which are spoken and events which happen in the history of the people of God. Thus we may justifiably claim that the Bible presents a history of salvation” (Baker, *Two Testaments, One Bible*, 263).

<sup>47</sup> Typology is defined as a form of historical interpretation and understood as “prefiguration,” “example,” “pattern,” “analogy,” “illustration,” or “correspondence.” It originates in the Old Testament, and it becomes a method of interpretation in the New Testament. Some theologians believe typology has become a way of thinking by the time of the New Testament, not only a method of interpretation. See also Richard M. Davidson, *Typology in Scriptures: A Study of Hermeneutical Typos Structures* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University, 1981).

<sup>48</sup> A promise is a “divine assurance of something to be done or not done in the future, which may be expressed in a formal announcement or agreement, or may be implied in an action or attitude” (Baker, *Two Testaments, One Bible*, 213). A promise includes predictions, prophecy, instructions, commands, assurances, warnings, and events with an implicit reference to the future. Walter Kaiser expands the promise to the level of the plan of God. He suggests that there are four unique moments in this plan: the promise made to Adam and Eve in Gen 3:15, the promise made to Abraham in Gen 12:2-3, the promise made to David in 2 Sam 7:16-19, and the New Covenant promise in Jer 31:31-34 (Walter Kaiser Jr., *The Christian and the “Old” Testament* [Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1998], 21-23).

<sup>49</sup> The unity of Scripture is based on the common origin of its parts in a community with a continuous sacred history (*Heilsgeschichte*). The Bible records in both Testaments the history of the people of God. The discontinuity is seen in the forms that belong to Israel in the Old Testament and the new forms that replace them in the New. Jesus Christ is seen as both the greatest continuity and discontinuity in the Bible. Baker describes this relationship as “unity in diversity” or a relationship in tension (Baker, *Two Testaments, One Bible*, 240-241).

(blessing).<sup>50</sup> Some of the promises are already fulfilled in the Old Testament, some are fulfilled in Christ, while other promises are fulfilled but not consummated. Baker concludes that this key theme of promise and fulfillment creates a complementary relationship of mutual interdependence between the Testaments.<sup>51</sup>

Charles Van Engen concludes that “missiologists are in need of a hermeneutical method that will enable them to deal with the whole of Scripture as a diverse unity. We cannot have mission without the Bible, nor can we understand the Bible apart from mission. The *missio Dei* is *God’s* mission.”<sup>52</sup> Since the assumptions provided by dispensationalism, covenant theology, and ecumenical theology are common to most of the works of mission theology surveyed, I will analyze each of these theologies and their implicit hermeneutics, as well as their implications on mission theology.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 216-220.

<sup>51</sup> “The Old Testament and New Testament belong together, they are interrelated and interdependent. Thus we may conclude that another aspect of the theological relationship between the Testaments is interdependence: they cannot be rightly understood except in relationship to each other” (ibid., 232). Rowley concurs: “The two Testaments are one, therefore, not in the sense that they duplicate a single message. . . . The two Testaments are one in that together they form a single whole. . . . The whole doctrine of divine grace, and divine initiative in redemption, is born in the Old Testament” (Rowley, *The Relevance of the Bible*, 82, 83, 88). However, he warns that “it is impossible to reduce all to a flat uniformity, and the effort to make Old Testament and New Testament say the same thing is dishonouring to both Testaments. . . . The Bible is a dynamic unity and not a static unity” (idem, *The Unity of the Bible*, 2-3, 7).

<sup>52</sup> Van Engen, *Mission on the Way*, 37. Van Engen is concerned that *missio Dei* is linked with the particular contexts it appears in, as well as the contemporary contexts. “Even when we affirm that we will take the whole of Scripture seriously, we still need a way to link the numerous contexts of the Bible with the here and now of our missionary endeavor today” (ibid.). The author prefers David Bosch’s model of “Bible as tapestry” approach because “we can affirm the Bible as a unified whole and also deal intentionally with the diversity of the history and cultures of the Bible” (ibid., 41).

<sup>53</sup> The assumptions of dispensationalism, covenant theology, and ecumenical theology are so prevalent that they are not questioned. Although dispensationalists disagree with covenant theologians on certain points, they share some of the assumptions discussed.

## Dispensationalism

Dispensationalism is a Protestant evangelical tradition which uses a particular system of interpretation applied to the biblical covenants. The so-called historical-grammatical method of interpretation, which is used both by those who believe in thought inspiration and those who hold verbal inspiration, is considered by dispensationalists to be “a verbal, plenary view of the inspiration of Scripture.”<sup>54</sup> What is specific to them, however, is the relationship between the biblical covenants and the dispensations based on time periods. Dispensationalism also presupposes that the Scripture calls for distinctions.<sup>55</sup> The result is that “the material of the Old Testament is distinguished from that of the New.”<sup>56</sup> Dispensationalism claims to provide “a satisfying philosophy of history” and prophecy, culminating with the millennium and the eschatological events.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1965), 10.

<sup>55</sup> Ryrie explains that “face-value understanding incorporates distinction; distinctions lead to dispensations. Normal interpretation leads to clear distinction between words, concepts, peoples, and economies. This consistent hermeneutical principle is the basis of dispensationalism” (ibid., 97-98).

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 15. “There is no interpreter of the Bible who does not recognize the need for certain basic distinctions in the Scriptures” (Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* [Chicago: Moody, 1995], 16). There are three major branches of dispensationalism recognized today: classic dispensationalism, revised dispensationalism, and progressive dispensationalism. The latter two are degrees of departure from classic dispensationalism and attempts to avoid its extreme stance. Although they share most dispensational assumptions, they are rejected by classic dispensationalists (Ron J. Bigalke Jr., *Progressive Dispensationalism: An Analysis of the Movement and Defense of Traditional Dispensationalism* [Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2005]). This dissertation chapter will analyze mainly classic dispensationalism with occasional references to the revised and progressive dispensationalism.

<sup>57</sup> Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, 21. However, there is little said about whom shall be satisfied by such a philosophy of history. Rather, one finds certain assumptions imposed on the texts that constitute the “philosophy.” In Charles F. Baker’s words, “If God has dealt differently with man during the various epochs of human history, then it would *appear* that these differences should be of great importance in formulating a true Theology” (*Dispensational Theology* [Grand Rapids, MI: Grace Bible College, 1972], 8-9).



Revelation is assumed to be progressive. Ryrie, one of the fathers of modern dispensationalism, claims that only dispensationalism does justice to the proper concept of the progress of revelation. He also assumes that only “dispensationalism claims to employ principles of literal, plain or normal, interpretation *consistently*,” and that this is the only valid hermeneutical principle.<sup>58</sup> However, the whole construct of dispensationalism seems to be based on the dispensationalist’s *feeling* of what is consistently literal.<sup>59</sup> Because revelation is assumed to be progressive, Ryrie feels that “we are in a better position to understand [what a dispensation is] than the writers of the New Testament themselves.”<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, 19, 20. “No study which denies or ignores the doctrine of dispensations is true Bible synthesis” (Cornelius R. Stam, *The Fundamentals of Dispensationalism* [Paterson, NJ: The Colt, 1951], 12). Dispensationalists seem to ignore the context of the text that sometimes requires a non-literal interpretation, as well as conditional prophecies that are not fulfilled, or fulfilled in a different way than expected by a literal interpretation. They do not accept that some Old Testament conditional prophecies may remain unfulfilled (Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 147). However, it is difficult for dispensationalists to apply their “literal” principle *consistently*. For example, dispensationalists reject any conditionalism in God’s promise to Abraham because this would affect the whole prophetic interpretive scheme making impossible for Israel to claim the land of the actual political state today. Showers insists that *forever* has to be taken at its face value, otherwise it will not mean *forever* (Renald E. Showers, *There Really Is a Difference!* [Belmawr, NJ: The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, 1990], 60). However, when referring to the permanent existence of the nation of Israel, he argues that *destroy* in Deut 4:26 cannot really mean *destroy* (or put out of existence) because this would allow the possibility that Israel would no longer be a nation (*ibid.*, 70). They propose that *destroy* in this case means “sent out of the land.” On the other hand, Ryrie claims that once the literal meaning of a word is not used, all objectivity is lost (*Dispensationalism*, 82). Saucy, who is considered the “father” of progressive dispensationalism, tries to distance himself from the strict literalistic interpretation by using a “complementary hermeneutic,” and adopts a mediating position between dispensationalist and non-dispensationalist interpretation (Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism: The Interface between Dispensational and Non-Dispensational Theology* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993], 27).

<sup>59</sup> “All his viewpoints stem from what he [the dispensationalist] feels to be a consistent application of the literal principle of interpretation of Scripture” (Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, 154). Their assumptions and hermeneutics originated primarily in a religious experience.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 199. “Dispensationalism sees the unity, the variety, and the progressiveness of this purpose of God for the world as no other system of theology” (Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 95).

A dispensation is “a period of time during which man is tested in respect of obedience to some *specific* revelation of the will of God . . . a distinguishable economy in the outworking of God’s purpose. . . . The dispensations are economies instituted and brought to their purposeful conclusion by God.”<sup>61</sup> This implies that certain regulations are changed or annulled by God, or new, fresh principles not valid before are introduced.<sup>62</sup> Ryrie claims that, for God, dispensations are economies, while for man they are responsibilities. Dispensationalists recognize seven dispensations in Scripture.<sup>63</sup>

Based on the literal interpretation of Scripture, dispensationalism keeps Israel and the Church distinct, claiming that God has two separate purposes for them that remain

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<sup>61</sup> Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, 22, 29, 30 (quoted from *The Scofield Reference Bible* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1945], 5). Dispensations are “distinguishingly different administrations of God in directing the affairs of the world” (ibid., 16, 25). Later authors find this definition of a dispensation problematic because it refers to a time period. A dispensation “is *not* a period of time but the *act of dealing out* or *that which is dealt out with*” (Stam, *The Fundamentals of Dispensationalism*, 25). Charles F. Baker corrects Scofield stating that “it is unfortunate that Dr. Scofield began his definition as a period of time, for a dispensation is not a period of time, although it must be admitted that a dispensation must take place during a certain period of time, and doubtless this is what Dr. Scofield intended to say” (*Dispensational Theology*, 2). Louis Berkhoff admits that Scofield’s use of “dispensation” is unscriptural, although he insists that the word is biblical (*Systematic Theology* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1941], 290).

<sup>62</sup> In addition to the superiority of the later on the earlier, dispensationalists apply a backward reading from the New Testament to the Old Testament. This is evident especially in their use of typology. “They do it also when they form a prophetic system that depends on an integrated interpretation of texts from many different parts of the Bible” (Vern S. Poythress, *Understanding Dispensationalism* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1987], 116). Dispensationalists believe their interpretation of Paul’s words is the correct one and apply it even to the Old Testament. Their understanding of Paul seems to have the highest authority in Scripture, not Christ. It is the same principle of later revelation’s superiority over the earlier one.

<sup>63</sup> The seven dispensations are: Innocency (Gen 1:3-3:6); Conscience (Gen 3:7-8:14); Civil Government (Gen 8:15-11:9); Patriarchal Rule (Gen 11:10-Exod 18:27); Mosaic Law (Exod 19:1-John 14:30); Grace (Acts 2:1-Rev 19:21); and Millenium (Rev 20:1-15) (Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 54). Ryrie admits these dispensations sometimes overlap while the promises in one dispensation are fulfilled during the next (ibid., 57). Progressive dispensationalism proposes only four dispensations: Patriarchal to Sinai, Mosaic to Messiah’s Ascension, Ecclesial to Messiah’s Return, and Zionic (including the Millennial).

distinct for eternity.<sup>64</sup> This distinction informs the reading of missionary texts in Scripture.<sup>65</sup> Both Ryrie and Stam believe that the commission in Matt 10:5-10 (to avoid going to the gentiles) belongs to the Jewish era, while the commission in Matt 28:19-20 belongs to the Church.<sup>66</sup> This is a clear illustration of how dispensationalist assumptions decide *a priori* the superiority of New Testament mission over Old Testament mission, or even the existence of mission only in the New Testament.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Darby's prophetic interpretation system assumes that the Church is a people with heavenly destinies, while Israel was a people with earthly destinies. Bass lists several features as distinguishing for dispensationalism: "its view of the nature and purpose of a dispensation; a rigidly applied literalism in the interpretation of Scripture; a dichotomy between Israel and the church; a restricted view of the church; a Jewish concept of the kingdom; a postponement of the kingdom; a distinction between law and grace that creates a multiple basis for God's dealing with man; a compartmentalization of Scripture; a pre-tribulation rapture; its view of the purpose of the great tribulation; its view of the nature of the millennial reign of Christ; its view of the eternal state, and its view of the apostate nature of Christendom. All of these may be reduced to two basic features: dispensationalism is rooted in a *hermeneutical principle of interpretation*, and in a chronology of events that were not known in the historic faith of the church before its rise. To these may be added the tendency of dispensationalism to be *separatistic in spirit and practice*" (Clarence B. Bass, *Backgrounds to Dispensationalism* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1960], 18-19, emphasis mine).

<sup>65</sup> Fuller indicates that dispensationalism teaches "a complete separation between God's dealings with Israel and with the Church. . . . Its basic reason for stressing the separation is to free the teachings of grace from the works of the law" (Daniel P. Fuller, *Gospel and Law: Contrast or Continuum?* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980], 6-7).

<sup>66</sup> Ryrie concludes that "anyone who attempts to interpret plainly this commission, which forbade the disciples to go to the Gentiles, and the commission that commands the same group to go to the Gentiles (Matt 28:19-20) either (1) gives up in confusion or (2) resorts to spiritualizing one of the passages or (3) recognizes a dispensational distinction" (*Dispensationalism*, 20). John A. Martin prefers to believe that "although some of the commands of Jesus were abrogated later in the book [the gospel of Matthew], the commands given in the sermon [on the mount] appear to have a timeless quality" (John A. Martin, "Christ, the Fulfillment of the Law in the Sermon on the Mount," in *Dispensationalism, Israel, and the Church*, ed. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992], 261).

<sup>67</sup> Progressive dispensationalism "sees a historical unity of God's kingdom program of salvation, yet allows distinctions especially as regards Israel" (Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism*, 29). It allows for a distinction between presuppositions and preunderstandings, the later ones being open to change (Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* [Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1993], 59-62).

Although Ryrie states that salvation is not different in different dispensations, he claims that grace is given in different measures in each one. Grace and law are antithetical in his view which he claims is shared by “all.”<sup>68</sup> He sees the Mosaic period and the period of grace and truth through Jesus Christ as antithetical. The Church and Israel are antithetical. The New Testament is seen as superior to the Old as the Church is superior to Israel.

However, because of dispensationalism’s rigid literalism, God has to literally fulfill his promises made to Abraham and Israel in the future. He bound himself by these promises and everything in the Old Testament is focused on Israel, excluding the gentiles.<sup>69</sup> The Church is not heir of any promises or blessings given to Israel. John F. Walvoord states that, since God’s kingdom will be “over the entire earth, not simply the land once conquered by Solomon,” it has to be different from Israel’s kingdom.<sup>70</sup>

Gentiles are accepted into the body of Christ (the Church) only after the Cross. Although this is an inconsistency, it is usually assumed as a “paradox” and it is not

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<sup>68</sup> However, Stam states that “while the principles of God never change, His dispensations, His dealings with men, do change from time to time. This includes even the terms of acceptance with God (blood sacrifices, circumcision, obedience to the law, etc.). . . . While God *refuses* works for salvation today, He *required* them under other dispensations. This was not, as we have explained, because works *in themselves* could ever save, but because they were the necessary expression of faith when so required” (Stam, *The Fundamentals of Dispensationalism*, 28, 29).

<sup>69</sup> Clarence B. Bass shows how such literalism applied to promises and prophecy distorts biblical eschatology up to the point that “Christ’s future reign on earth will be for the purpose of fulfilling them in a relation to Israel *distinctly different from His present relation to the church*” (*Backgrounds to Dispensationalism*, 25).

<sup>70</sup> John F. Walvoord, “The Kingdom of God in the Old Testament,” in *Vital Prophetic Issues: Examining Promises and Problems in Eschatology*, ed. Roy B. Zuck [Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1995], 124-125).

questioned.<sup>71</sup> But, if the gentiles could be saved during the Christian era, what prevented them from being saved earlier?<sup>72</sup> What about people like Naaman, who came to Israel but was not circumcised or officially accepted into Israel? The dispensationalists' answer hides behind "mystery" and God's sovereign choice but no reason is offered *why* God healed such a pagan and accepted his worship. The gentiles during Israel's time are excluded *a priori* and this is considered a given.

The dispensationalist answer raises fundamental questions about God's character and theodicy. If God is love, as declared by so many biblical passages (i.e., 1 John 4:8), how could he create such an unfair dispensational system? What kind of God would exclude his own creatures from the possibility to be saved? As a result of this view there is no centrifugal mission in the Old Testament since there is no possibility for the gentiles

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<sup>71</sup> The inclusion of both the Jews and Gentiles in the Body of Christ is seen as a "mystery" which was not "active" during the Old Testament times. Ryrie believes that "the Body of Christ could not have been constituted until after the death of Christ, and the time of the revelation of that truth does not affect the institution of it. The Old Testament does predict Gentile blessing for the millennial period (Isa 2:1-4; 61:5-6), but the specific blessings do not include equality in the Body of Christ. . . . The equality is the point of the mystery revealed to the apostles and prophets in New Testament times" (*Dispensationalism*, 124-125). Ryrie also claims that the people living in Old Testament times could not be indwelt by Christ or the Spirit (*ibid.*). It is interesting to note Darby's position, the founder of Dispensationalism, on the relationship between Gentiles and prophecy in prophetic interpretation: "First, in prophecy, when the Jewish church or nation (exclusive of the Gentile parenthesis in their history) is concerned, i.e., when the address is directed to the Jews, there we may look for a plain and direct testimony, because earthly things were the Jews' proper portion. And, on the contrary, where the address is to the Gentiles, i.e., when the Gentiles are concerned in it, there we may look for symbol, because earthly things were not their portion, and the system of revelation must to them be symbolical. When therefore facts are addressed to the Jewish church as a subsisting body, as to what concerns themselves, I look for a plain, common sense, literal statement, as to a people with whom God had *direct* dealing upon earth" (John N. Darby, *The Collected Writings*, ed. William Kelly [Oak Park, IL: Bible Truth Publishers, 1962], 35).

<sup>72</sup> Ryrie believes that "up to the time of Abraham God's administration concerned all nations, whereas with Abraham he began to single out one nation" ("The Necessity of Dispensationalism," in Zuck, *Vital Prophetic Issues*, 155).

to be saved in the same way as believers in the New Testament.<sup>73</sup> Such logic does not make sense. The Church also has a distinct time in history, which does not cover the time of Israel, for the Church began its existence only at Pentecost when the Spirit was given.

Ryrie assumes that Israel was called as a nation for a national purpose and not only for the spiritual work of salvation. Since the Church could not fulfill the national purposes of Israel, thus it is not able to be a continuation of Israel. As a result, the Church and Israel are assigned different missions.<sup>74</sup>

Dispensationalism agrees that God does have redeemed people throughout the ages, but they do not constitute one people of God but peoples of God. The Church does

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<sup>73</sup> Stam explains that “all we are seeking to establish here is the fact of *progressive revelation* and the utter unscripturalness of the tradition that those who lived before Christ were saved by looking forward in faith to His finished work. . . . It is evident, then, that the saints of past ages were not all saved by believing the same things, for God did not reveal the same things to them all. Indeed, even the stated terms of salvation were changed from time to time. . . . These means of approach to God, while they indicated that Israel was no better than the Gentiles, gave them, at the same time, a distinct advantage over the Gentiles—and a great responsibility toward them. Israel was not to keep these blessings to herself. . . . They were to be the *agents*, not merely the *objects* of God’s blessing. . . . The Word and worship of God were committed to Israel that *through her* the Gentiles might find God. . . . Israel’s covenant relationship with God and her God-given religion, of course, constituted a “middle wall of partition” between her and the ungodly Gentiles, but this did not mean that Israel was to leave the Gentiles in their ungodly state and keep them outside the wall. The Abrahamic Covenant indicated otherwise and from the passage just quoted from Isaiah [56:6, 7], it is clear that any Gentiles, willing to become proselytes to Judaism were to be welcomed to the temple, where a covenant people found access to God. But did the people of Israel make this known among the nations? They did not. They would have left the Gentile world in darkness forever. Indeed, the temple, meant to be a house of prayer for all nations, had become a center of villainy and fraud” (Stam, *The Fundamentals of Dispensationalism*, 34, 40, 85-87). However, Walvoord claims that “Scripture revelation concerns itself primarily with the place of Israel and the Church, and therefore does not deal in detail with the place of Gentile saints in the Old Testament” (John F. Walvoord, President, Dallas Theological Seminary, November 5, 1956, to Daniel Fuller; quoted in Fuller, “The Hermeneutics of Dispensationalism,” 206).

<sup>74</sup> Another variant is that the nations are simply the means by which God fulfills his purposes for his two peoples, the Jews and the Church (Fuller, “The Hermeneutics of Dispensationalism,” 45).

not equal Israel.<sup>75</sup> Ryrie calls these distinctions “obvious and necessary.”<sup>76</sup> He insists on keeping the distinctions between categories (Church and Israel, God’s purposes with each of them, the Church and the Kingdom) clear and sharp, stating that “the truth must stand even though it may seem to involve paradox to the human mind.”<sup>77</sup> Ryrie claims these distinctions will be preserved even in heaven.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> The New Testament Christian is in “living union with Christ,” while the Old Testament saint is not. In fact, there are three categories of people recognized by dispensationalists: Jews, gentiles, and Christians. The Jews are the descendants of Abraham inheriting the earthly promises, but lacking regeneration or adoption (although Abraham was the channel for these). The gentiles never had any acceptable relationship with God. The Christians come from these two categories, but are born again and thus members of the body of Christ. Jesus rejects this distinction in John 8:39, 56.

<sup>76</sup> Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, 140-141, 143. “If the dispensational emphasis on the distinctiveness of the Church seems to result in a ‘dichotomy,’ let it stand as long as it is a result of literal interpretation” (ibid., 155).

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 145. Covenant Theology interprets this dichotomy, between Israel and law and the Church and grace, as “simply dissimilar manifestations of God’s one purpose, whereas Dispensationalism sees these differences as expressive of two purposes” (see Fuller, “The Hermeneutics of Dispensationalism,” 147). Walvoord corrects this view (law in the Old Testament, grace in the New Testament) but still sees grace in the OT as being different from that in the New Testament; there are different degrees of grace, more grace being offered in the New Testament. Feinberg offers a variation or combination between these two positions, and believes that grace existed during patriarchal time up to Sinai, but from Sinai on only the law was valid until Christ. He bases his view on the idea that law and grace cannot coexist, they must belong to different dispensations (*Continuity and Discontinuity*, 63-86).

<sup>78</sup> Gerstner concludes that “dispensationalists make a qualitative distinction between Israel and the Church. They are two different peoples, not the same people of God. They have a different relationship to Him in this life and a different future” (John H. Gerstner, *A Primer on Dispensationalism* [Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1982], 17). Dispensationalists claim that 2 Tim 2:15 calls for a sharp division of the different parts of the Bible. Although the Bible contains divisions, dispensationalism sets them in opposition and presents them as conflicting. The opposition between law and grace is such an example. However, Gerstner states that “genuine biblical revelation is developmental; one stage unfolds naturally from another as the unfolding of the blossom of a flower” (ibid., 2). He asks a pertinent question: “Is it the literalistic tendency that produces this divided Scripture, or is it the belief in a divided Scripture that drives the dispensationalist to ultra-literalism at some point?” He thinks it is the latter (ibid., 5). Robertson states that this basic dualism, “the hallmark of dispensational teaching . . . arises from a metaphysical rather than a hermeneutical presupposition. . . . A form of Platonism actually permeates the hermeneutical roots of dispensationalism” (O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1980], 213-214). The separation should be temporal.

The issue of *progressive revelation* is vital for dispensationalists. Since dispensations are only stages in the progress of revelation, they “are not simply as different arrangements between God and humankind, but as successive arrangements in progressive revelation and accomplishment of redemption.”<sup>79</sup> Dispensationalists read the New Testament into the Old by a forced backward reading, using texts from the letters of Paul to interpret the mosaic period or the law as being ethnically focused, or God having some other purpose beside the salvation of humanity. Judgment and condemnation, as found in the Old Testament, is not salvation, they say. “Progressive revelation views the Bible not as a textbook on theology but as the continually unfolding revelation of God given by various means throughout the successive ages.”<sup>80</sup> The emphasis is on *successive* and *progressive*. Any later stage is superior to or supersedes the previous ones.

However, dispensationalism claims to combine unity with diversity. Ryrie goes so far as to state that dispensationalism “alone has a broad enough unifying principle to do justice to the unity of the progress of revelation on the one hand and the distinctiveness of the various stages in that progress on the other.”<sup>81</sup>

The weakness dispensationalism sees in covenant theology’s unifying principle is its exclusive soteriological goal. In contrast, the unifying principle of dispensationalism is

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<sup>79</sup> Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 48.

<sup>80</sup> Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, 35-36.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 35. “Dispensationalism alone sees the unity, the variety, and the progressiveness of this purpose of God for the world” (ibid., 105).



declared to be “doxological, or the glory of God, and the dispensations reveal the glory of God as He manifests His character in the differing stewardships given to man.”<sup>82</sup>

In terms of *eschatology*, dispensationalism is a system of interpretation, not only an outline of events. The hermeneutical principle claimed is literalism applied consistently (consistent literalism), especially to prophecies.<sup>83</sup> It claims that the Old Testament prophecies made to Abraham and David *must* be fulfilled during the millennium in order to keep Israel and the Church distinct.<sup>84</sup> Ryrie acknowledges his assumption when he states that “the understanding of the how and when of the fulfillment of Israel’s prophecies is in direct proportion to one’s clarity of distinction between Israel

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 102-103. “Covenant theology can only emphasize the unity, and in so doing overemphasize it until it becomes the sole governing category of interpretation” (ibid., 35).

<sup>83</sup> Scofield states that in prophetic passages “we reach the ground of absolute literalness. Figures are often found in the prophecies, but the figure invariably has a literal fulfillment. Not one instance exists of a ‘spiritual’ or figurative fulfillment of prophecy. . . . Jerusalem is always Jerusalem, Israel always Israel, Zion always Zion. . . . Prophecies may never be spiritualized, but are always literal” (Cyrus I. Scofield, *The Scofield Bible Correspondence School, Course of Study*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. [Dallas, TX: 1907], 45-46). However, Scofield will allow for double meanings and spiritual meanings, as long as it would not imply “that the church participates in the fulfillment of this prophecy” (Poythress, *Understanding Dispensationalism*, 25).

<sup>84</sup> Although God’s promise of land to Abraham (so called Palestinian covenant) takes place in Gen 12 (and is associated with Deut 30:3), dispensationalists prefer to use the subsequent repetition of the covenant in Gen 15 in order to avoid any conditionality attached to the promise. It seems to be better to keep God responsible for a unilateral promise than to admit any failure on Israel’s part (see John R. Master, “The New Covenant,” in *Issues in Dispensationalism*, ed. Wesley R. Willis and John R. Master [Chicago: Moody, 1994], 95-96). Master believes that “Abraham’s being made a great nation is foundational for the blessings to the nations” (ibid., 96). He claims that there is no specific revelation regarding the universal blessings to all peoples being independent from the “national” promise made to Abraham. This literalism goes so far as saying that such an attempt “may violate the unitary nature and context of the promise to Abram” (ibid.). However, when talking about the New Covenant in Jer 31:31-34 and the work of the Holy Spirit, Master states that “although the new covenant is not specifically related to the ministry of the Holy Spirit, such an inference would not seem strange or unnatural” (ibid., 97). So much for the consistency of literalism! Saucy shares Master’s conviction that “because the land is connected with the nation of Israel, any reference to God’s continuing concern for that nation would have a territorial aspect. . . . The land aspect of the Abrahamic promise retains validity in the New Testament” (Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism*, 50, 56).

and the Church.”<sup>85</sup> The pretribulationist rapture and the millennial kingdom of Christ on earth become crucial for a theology which assumes such distinction. “The entire program culminates, not in eternity but in history, in the millennial kingdom of the Lord Christ.”<sup>86</sup>

Dispensationalists have a particular understanding of Gen 1-11, too. “Little is said about God’s dealings with man before Abraham.”<sup>87</sup> Because the first humans failed, and God’s mission during the so-called “primeval” history also failed, God had to institute a new method of dealing with man, so he called Abraham.

The Abrahamic Covenant is basic to dispensationalism, being considered “key” to the entire Old Testament reaching for fulfillment in the New. Although a progressive dispensationalist, Saucy thinks that “only with the call of Abraham does God step into human history to initiate his own kingdom program of salvation.”<sup>88</sup> He also considers that the root of all salvation is contained in the divine-human relationship paradigm of the Abrahamic Covenant, which is “foundational and comprehensive in nature.”<sup>89</sup>

The issue of *predestination*, another strong point of dispensationalism, reflects on the concept of election. Since Israel was elected without conditions, there is no falling

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<sup>85</sup> Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 158-159. Dispensationalists do not have a dispensation of the kingdom to correspond to the covenant with David, because they projected everything pertaining to God’s kingdom on earth into the future, “to be realized only in the millennium” (Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, 219). They have no dispensation of the eternal state either because of the belief that dispensational economies are related to this earthly world and the culmination of God’s entire program is found in the millennial kingdom on earth, not in heaven. It is a very “secularized” approach. In Robertson’s words, the dispensations are human “arbitrary impositions on the biblical order” (ibid., 227).

<sup>86</sup> Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, 104.

<sup>87</sup> Fuller, *The Hermeneutics of Dispensationalism*, 204.

<sup>88</sup> Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism*, 40.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 41, 49.

from God's plan, dispensationalists say. But they confuse unconditional election with unconditional salvation, claiming that Israel will be saved no matter what it does or how it lives. This is in sharp contrast with their claim that the Old Testament saints had to perfectly obey the law in order to be saved. It is also dispensationalism that creates the premise for universalism, claiming that everyone will be saved in Israel and the Church.

Dispensationalists think that Old Testament saints cannot be compared with New Testament Christians. The latter are considered born-again through the Holy Spirit, while Old Testament people are saved like Paul before his conversion by obedience to the law. This sharp distinction in salvation requirements leads to different missionary methods and theologies in different dispensations. As a result, the centrifugal mission found in the New Testament *has to be* absent from the Old Testament due to the assumptions imposed on the biblical text. In Gerstner's words, "this division between the Old Testament people of God and the New Testament people of God is far-reaching."<sup>90</sup>

The issue raised by dispensationalists is separation versus the biblical principle of integration. Dispensationalism divides rather than unites, and fails to demonstrate the unity of the Bible.<sup>91</sup> It divides the Scripture, the people of God, the way of salvation, and the missionary methods used by God's people in each period. Even the future of saved

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<sup>90</sup> Gerstner, *A Primer on Dispensationalism*, 7.

<sup>91</sup> "The great test of the adequacy of a hermeneutic and its resulting system of Biblical interpretation is whether it can demonstrate the unity of the Bible. . . . If it be the Word of God, its various teachings should all form a coherent unity. This presupposition of the Bible's unity provides a test for the validity of a system of interpretation: if the system is not able to demonstrate the Bible's unity, it must be an inadequate system" (Fuller, *The Hermeneutics of Dispensationalism*, 180). Fuller notes that dispensationalism lacks precisely the capacity for integrating various biblical entities and concepts. "Having declared certain concepts in the Bible to be irreconcilable, it is unable to reconcile these 'irreconcilables' with passages which clearly do teach their reconciliation" (ibid., 186).

people will be divided; the Christian gentiles will be in heaven while Israel will be fully restored on this earth. This hermeneutic even creates two Gods in the two Testaments.

Since dispensationalist theology is based on extra-biblical and faulty assumptions and leads to non-biblical conclusions, it is not a legitimate base for the study of mission in the Old Testament or for a comprehensive mission theology of the whole Bible.

### **Covenant Theology**

Covenant Theology claims its emphasis is on the unity of Scripture and the continuity of its themes under the larger umbrella of covenants. O. Palmer Robertson believes that “every school of interpretation today has come to appreciate the significance of the covenants for the understanding of the distinctive message of the Scriptures.”<sup>92</sup>

Robertson describes the covenant as “a bond in blood sovereignly administered.”<sup>93</sup> It implies a verbalized commitment on the part of the party issuing the

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<sup>92</sup> Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, vii. Since his work is considered definitive on the subject, I will use his statements as basis for the analysis of covenant theology.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 4. The meaning of the “bond in blood” is the “bond of life and death,” pointing to its inviolable character. However, not everyone agrees with Robertson’s definition. In his book about covenant, McKenzie analyzes the concept in different sections of the Bible and applies it to different genres, and concludes that defining the covenant “is not as easy as it might seem. . . . To what extent is ‘covenant’ in the Bible promissory? Are both parties obligated or just one? Is the biblical covenant imposed by one party on another, or are its terms negotiated and arrived at by mutual consent and agreement?” (Steven L. McKenzie, *Covenant* [St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2000], 3). Hillers also shows that “covenant” is not one uniform idea all through the Bible, and that scholars who used this assumption ended up with a variety of views: “mutual obligation, we read, is the essence of the relation; the covenant is a completely one-sided arrangement; God initiates any covenant; men take the initiative in concluding it; there are four covenants in the Priestly writer—no, three, no, two. And of course, in each different work we find the writer struggling with a recalcitrant body of evidence which will not easily fit his scheme” (Delbert R. Hillers, *Covenant: The History of a Biblical Idea* [Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins, 1969], 7). Gerhard Hasel describes the covenant as “divinely initiated and sovereign-ordained relationship between God and man. God as superior Lord graciously discloses, confirms, and fulfills the covenant promise” (*Covenant in Blood* [Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1982], 17).

oath, and most of the time it is accompanied by visible signs that seal the covenant.<sup>94</sup>

Covenants issued by God are marked by blood or sacrifices. The very meaning of the term covenant indicates a kind of cutting. Covenants initiated by man with God are usually considered only a renewal of a previous covenant established by God.<sup>95</sup>

Covenant theologians insist that a key aspect is that the divine covenant is unilateral, excluding any form of negotiation or bargaining. It is issued by God and he dictates the terms and content of the covenant. They say that God's sovereignty excludes the possibility that a divine covenant be established between equals.

Some theologians begin recognizing covenants only with Noah, while most feel much more comfortable to begin with Abraham in Gen 12.<sup>96</sup> In spite of recognizing covenantal terminology, imagery, and symbols in Gen 1-11, covenant theologians deal almost exclusively with God's covenants with Abraham, Israel, and David.<sup>97</sup> They indicate that these Old Testament covenants have a unified character expressed through a

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<sup>94</sup> The rainbow, the circumcision, and the Sabbath are recognized as symbols or signs of different covenants.

<sup>95</sup> Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, 9ff. He rejects the idea that a covenant can be equated with the "last will and testament," because this indicates the unavoidable coming death, while a covenant offers a choice between life and death. "A covenant is not a testament," says Robertson (*ibid.*, 14).

<sup>96</sup> Dispensationalists pointed to the inconsistency of covenant theologians in applying their own covenant definition. Robertson corrects this by employing later passages in Jer 33:20, 21, 25, 26 and Hos 6:7 that refer to God's creational relationship in covenantal terminology. The covenants start only with Noah because this is the first instance the term *b'rit* is used (McKenzie, *Covenant*, 4). Hasel believes that "the covenant is the rational principle, or the ground, of creation. The biblical picture of creation is prior to the covenant, and the covenant finds its meaning and its completion in relationship to creation, not vice versa" (*Covenant in Blood*, 15).

<sup>97</sup> "Whatever else the genealogies of peoples other than Israel may convey (e.g., human solidarity), their position at the outset of the canon signals an awareness of people groups and their importance. These genealogies, an ancient method of history writing, form more than a background or even the context for Israel's story" (Martens, *God's Design*, 331).

structural and thematic *unity*.<sup>98</sup> Each one builds on the previous one and implies a process of election. Abraham is elected to be a blessing for the nations, Israel is elected as God's representative on earth, and David's dynasty is established "forever."

McKenzie explains that "the crucial points of covenantal inauguration under Moses and David reflect the *continuity* of the covenants. . . . The Abrahamic covenant continued to function actively after the institution of the Mosaic covenant. In the context of the history of the Mosaic covenant, the Abrahamic covenant found a basic fulfillment."<sup>99</sup> However, the covenant at Sinai is considered central for the Old Testament period. It contains the law which stipulates the conditions for both vertical and horizontal relationships, as well as being a reflection of God's character.<sup>100</sup>

Robertson shows that the unity of the covenants is also genealogical. It is not difficult to see why, since both Israel and David are part of Abraham's family tree.<sup>101</sup> As a result, the three covenants are not necessarily three different covenants but a *contextualized renewal* of the first genealogical and historical covenant considered with

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<sup>98</sup> "This faithfulness across generations serves to bind each of the successive covenants to one another. The covenants of Abraham, Moses, and David actually are successive stages of a single covenant" (McKenzie, *Covenant*, 41). Even the new covenant in Jer 31:3 is seen only as a fulfillment of these three earlier covenants.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 32-33.

<sup>100</sup> "Sinai stands at the heart of the Bible and is in a real sense its beginning. In fact, it was in the light of Sinai that Hebrews looked back upon their earlier history" (Roland J. Faley, *Bonding with God: A Reflective Study of Biblical Covenant* [New York: Paulist, 1997], 5).

<sup>101</sup> "David's son is not simply heir of the covenant promises made to Moses and Abraham. The genealogical promises of God's covenant assure his participation in the blessing of the Abrahamic and the Mosaic as well as the Davidic covenant" (Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, 35).

Abraham. Using passages like Ps 105:8-10 or Deut 7:9 covenant theologians point to the eternal succession of the elected ones, God's covenant people.<sup>102</sup>

The hermeneutical key espoused by covenant theologians for reading the three covenants as united and somehow exclusive of others is found in the New Testament, particularly in Heb 8:10 and 2 Cor 6:16. They believe these passages provide a summarizing essence of the covenant which is "applied explicitly in Scripture to the Abrahamic, the Mosaic, the Davidic and the new covenants. The uniformity of application of this single theme binds the covenants together."<sup>103</sup> Because Jesus is the unifying focus of the Scripture, "the covenants of God are one. The recurring summation of the essence of the covenant testifies to this fact."<sup>104</sup> This uniformity and the backward reading of Scripture in this case influence the general understanding of the covenant idea.

Robertson argues that at the heart of the covenant is the "Immanuel" principle of God dwelling with people, but this dwelling seems to be restricted to Israel with whom God made a covenant. However, Ezek 37:26-28 indicates that the final goal of God is "that the nations will know that I am the Lord," widening the scope of his presence in the Sanctuary (cf. Rev 21). In fact, Robertson uses this particular goal to justify the "future expectations concerning the Sanctuary . . . its realization in the form of the temple."<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> "Never will the line of the faithful be cut off completely. In every generation the line of God's covenant people shall be maintained" (ibid., 37). However, Walter Vogels talks about parallel covenants made with the nations, who experience their own "Exodus," are punished, and are promised restoration (*God's Universal Covenant* [Ottawa, Canada: Saint Paul University, 1979], 73-113).

<sup>103</sup> Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, 49.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 50.

Theologians also point to the *diversity* of the covenants. The first distinction is made between *pre-creation* and *post-creation* covenants. Robertson *denies any possibility* that the Godhead made a *covenant before creating the earth* (against Eph 1:4; 2 Tim 1:9; Heb 13:20). The definition of the covenant, as a sovereignly administered bond, does not welcome the concept of a mutual contract. Robertson allows only for God's "covenantal love" to exist before creation, recognizing his intention to redeem his people.<sup>106</sup>

The second distinction is made between the covenant of *works* and the covenant of *grace*. Although the period before sin entered the earth is seen as an ideal for humans, it was labeled as a "testing" period for Adam, who *could have been saved by works*. The presuppositions become clear: "All the dealings of God with man *since the fall* must be seen as possessing a basic unity."<sup>107</sup> This imposition restricts God in his actions and creates different ways of salvation in different time periods.

The third distinction is made between the *Old* and the *New* covenant, the *pre-Christ* and *after-Christ* period. Taking Gal 2-4 as a basis, covenant theologians place the two covenants and periods in opposition. However, Robertson states that "a single way of salvation always has been present," in spite of the radical distinction between the two covenants and his earlier statements on Adam being saved by works.<sup>108</sup> The covenant at

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<sup>106</sup> "Affirming the role of redemption in the eternal counsels of God is not the same as proposing the existence of a pre-creation covenant between Father and Son" (ibid., 54). Walter Vogels agrees that covenants span only from creation to the eschaton, divided in three phases: from Adam to Abraham ("primitive" universal covenant), from Abraham to Jesus (the historical covenant with Israel), and from Jesus to the eschaton (the new universal covenant) (Vogels, *God's Universal Covenant*, 12).

<sup>107</sup> Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, 55, emphasis mine. Robertson proposes the replacing of the work/grace labels with the creation/redemption pair (ibid., 57).

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 59.



Sinai is described as opposed to the Abrahamic covenant of promise.<sup>109</sup> “But this contrast,” says Robertson, “must not be understood as rupturing the unity and progress of the revelation of the covenant of redemption.”<sup>110</sup> Although unity and continuity are affirmed, diversity and distinction are frequently presupposed in covenant theology.<sup>111</sup> The question is When was the redemption covenant established and between which parties? If the redemption covenant was established between the persons of the godhead, isn’t this a covenant between equals established long before the creation of the earth?

The covenant of *creation* is also distinct and opposed to the covenant of *redemption*. The covenant of redemption is seen as being necessary because of humans breaking the creation covenant.<sup>112</sup> Robertson shows that “creation originates a people of

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 61. Clarifying the sharp distinctions made by Paul in his epistles, Robertson says that “old and new covenants merge into a basic harmony. Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants unite in the purposes of God’s grace. But no unifying factor whatsoever arises to harmonize the message of the Judaizers with the message of Christ. This antithesis is absolute” (ibid.).

<sup>110</sup> Robertson argues for the need for balance between “the harmonizing unity of the single covenant of redemption and its historical diversity” (ibid., 191). Covenant theologians describe the covenant of redemption as including the covenant with Adam (commencement), with Noah (preservation), with Abraham (promise), with Moses (law), with David (kingdom), and with Jesus (consummation).

<sup>111</sup> Although Robertson notices the Sabbath as an important element of continuity between the Testaments and covenants, he artificially introduces a distinction claiming that the “new covenant radically alters the new perspective. The current believer in Christ does not follow the Sabbath pattern of the people of the old covenant. He does not first labor six days, looking hopefully toward rest. Instead he begins the week by rejoicing in the rest already accomplished by the cosmic event of Christ’s resurrection” (Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, 73). It is interesting how his argument of change applies only to the Sabbath, and not to marriage and labor, the other two ordinances embedded in the creation structure which are clearly affected by the curses in Gen 3. The Sabbath remains the same. On the same argument line, W. J. Dumbrell indicates that the goal of the original covenant at creation was *rest*. “On the Sabbath, therefore, Israel is to reflect upon the question of ultimate purposes for herself as a nation, and for the world over which she is set. . . . The garden is presented as a center of world blessing” (*Covenant and Creation: An Old Testament Covenantal Theology* [Exeter, UK: Paternoster, 1984], 35).

<sup>112</sup> “The covenant of redemption is established immediately in conjunction with man’s failure under the covenant of creation” (Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, 91).

God. Redemption recreates a people of God.”<sup>113</sup> He discerns very clearly that the people of God exist before Gen 12 and before Israel under Moses.

God’s intention in the redemption covenant is described as restoration of the blessings of the previous covenant for humans, although the presence of curses is not explained. Robertson believes that the “particular test of probation is present no longer,” suggesting that obedience is no longer a test.<sup>114</sup> He calls this covenant “original,” although Paul indicates that the redemption covenant has been established before the earth’s creation.<sup>115</sup> Robertson’s assumption that the Old Testament law is no longer mandatory creates basic divisions in his understanding of law and sin in Scripture, and by implication an inconsistent human response of obedience to God.

The covenant of *preservation*, made with Noah, is considered a bridge between the covenant of creation and the covenant of redemption. Robertson identifies in it the “cultural” mandate of Gen 1:28, and correctly indicates that the covenant of preservation is *a repetition of the original mandate in a new context*, which he claims is a redemptive context.<sup>116</sup> “The covenant with Noah binds together God’s purposes in creation with his purposes in redemption.”<sup>117</sup> However, it is interesting to note that Robertson believes God’s covenant with Noah before the flood, which perfectly fits the covenantal form, is

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<sup>113</sup> Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, 73. John H. Walton adds the revelatory and soteriologic purposes of the covenant (*Covenant: God’s Purpose, God’s Plan* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994], 25).

<sup>114</sup> Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, 92.

<sup>115</sup> Paul speaks of an “eternal” covenant (Rom 16:25, 26; Eph 1:4; 2 Tim 1:9; Heb 13:20).

<sup>116</sup> Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, 110. The same pattern should be used for the covenant made before creation and all other covenants after creation and sin.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

the same post-flood covenant, only in a preliminary form to be inaugurated after the deluge. He is not consistent in applying this same principle to other covenants or all covenants.<sup>118</sup> The universality and the cosmic dimension of God's covenant with Noah is recognized and considered a basis for the global proclamation of the gospel today.

God's sovereignty is again emphasized in the covenant with *Abraham*.<sup>119</sup> The form of the covenant implies that Abraham should go out, centrifugally, in order for God to be able to fulfill his promises (Gen 12:1-3), and later he is required to pass on the circumcision rite as a symbol of entering the covenant.<sup>120</sup> If the seal of this covenant is no longer necessary in the New Testament (Acts 15) this raises questions about the validity and continuation of the other covenantal elements involved (i.e., blessings, curses).

Since the text does not describe Abraham as passing between the halves of the animals (Gen 15), he is considered passive by many scholars and only the recipient of the promise. This understanding of the covenant assumes that Abraham does not have free choice or is not allowed to exercise it. The covenant is presented as somehow *imposed* by God on Abraham, a covenant in which he has no say (Gen 17:9-14).

In the case of God's covenant with *Moses*, the covenantal aspect is considered to always take precedence over the legal aspect, while the laws are only "one mode of

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 110ff.

<sup>119</sup> "The call of God to Abram, with its promise of Abram being a blessing to all nations, immediately links the particular Hebrew story with the more universalist subject matter of Genesis 1-11. God's interaction with a select people is for the benefit of all peoples" (Martens, *God's Design*, 331).

<sup>120</sup> Later repetitions of the covenant maintain the centrifugal condition on Abraham (17:1) although he already left his country and began to fulfill the requirement. Robertson believes that God is ratifying the covenant with a ceremony only in Gen 15, Gen 12 being only a promise. He sees circumcision only as "a seal of the Abrahamic covenant" and its role as only to "remind of the surety of the promises" (Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, 147).

administration of the covenantal bond.”<sup>121</sup> The distinctiveness of this particular covenant is described as an “externalized summation of the will of God.”<sup>122</sup>

It is interesting that covenant theologians consider the covenant with Abraham valid even today, without being broken in its application by the Mosaic covenant.<sup>123</sup> Justification by faith is seen as valid even during the Mosaic period of law-covenant. Robertson applies the “covenant of works” terminology only to the time before the fall, to the creation covenant; the “covenant of law” implies grace. However, the continuity of the covenants is in question if the covenant of law is valid even today but its requirements are no longer binding. Since Robertson states that these law principles were valid and working even before Sinai, it is not clear why this period is separated as a different covenant?<sup>124</sup> The argument is that life by the law has been replaced by life in the Holy Spirit. Since law and grace are present even today, why do we have a new covenant?<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, 171.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid. Robertson believes that the Abrahamic covenant of promise and the Mosaic covenant of law complement each other (218).

<sup>123</sup> Robertson agrees that “God renews an ancient commitment to his people by the covenant of Moses. . . . Originally established under Adam, confirmed under Noah and Abraham, the covenantal relationship renewed under Moses cannot disturb God’s ongoing commitment by its emphasis on the legal dimension of the covenant relationship” (ibid., 172).

<sup>124</sup> Robertson shows that the covenant of law relates not only organically but also progressively to God’s redemptive purposes. He claims that “the Mosaic covenant is an advancement beyond all that precedes. . . . By presenting an externalized summation of the will of God, the Mosaic covenant advances positively the revelation of God’s purposes in redemption” (ibid., 186). The author believes that the nationalization of the covenant people is a progress, while Israel “stands in a much better relation to the God of the covenant” than previous people by receiving “a fuller revelation” (ibid., 187). He even warns of the serious consequences if someone will deny the progression of God’s revelation throughout history.

<sup>125</sup> See the discussion in Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, 183-184. Is the Holy Spirit teaching a different law?

Robertson uses the assumption of progressive revelation which does not allow for regression.<sup>126</sup> However, this progressive revelation is given against a continuing degradation of the human condition and a departure from the ideal. This concept presupposes that Adam and Eve were less aware of the redemption plan when they talked face to face with God in the Garden than after the fall, or when compared with later generations. The superiority of later revelation raises questions about God's fairness.

When comparing the "newness" of the New covenant with Jeremiah's covenant (Jer 31:33-34), Robertson claims that people living under the New covenant have a deeper and richer experience of forgiveness from sin.<sup>127</sup> Based on such assumptions, he declares the superiority of the New covenant over the Mosaic administration of law.

Each individual covenant is presented as having an element of *conditionality* included. Under Abraham it was circumcision, under Moses it was obedience, while under David "the sinful king was to be beaten with the rod of men. In each case, full participation in the blessings of the covenant had a condition."<sup>128</sup> Each of the three covenants is seen only as an anticipation of the New covenant, which is considered superior and unconditional.<sup>129</sup> However, if people living during the New covenant have an advantage over their predecessors, God's character and fairness is in question.

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<sup>126</sup> "The concept of a continued progression in the unfolding of God's redemptive truth cannot allow for such a movement of retrogression. . . . The Mosaic covenant of law was an advancement over the Abrahamic covenant of promise. That which was the very essence of the Mosaic covenant represented a step of progress in God's redemptive purposes" (ibid., 186, 188).

<sup>127</sup> "Advancement in revelation involves advancement in life-experience. . . . The fuller revelation available today brings with it a richer experience of redemption's grace" (ibid., 191).

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 247.

<sup>129</sup> "Inherent in every Old Testament type was an inadequacy which demanded some more perfect fulfillment" (ibid., 250).

The covenant of *consummation* raises a number of questions, too, since its existence is justified with the exile of Israel. Robertson considers that the exile as “the enactment of covenantal curse in redemptive history vivifies the necessity for some new form of covenantal administration having a more lasting effectiveness than the form by which the covenant was administered through Abraham, Moses, and David.”<sup>130</sup> This is described as hope beyond devastation. The basic idea is that *this covenant supersedes all previous covenants*.<sup>131</sup>

The “newness” of this last covenant is that it marks a break with the previous covenants. By this covenant God will fulfill all the unfulfilled promises of earlier covenants, and the land promised to Abraham will become “a solid and unshakeable reality.”<sup>132</sup> Although all previous covenants implied an “everlasting” element, this last covenant seems to imply more, adding the eschatological dimension.<sup>133</sup> All previous covenants find their “everlasting” realization in this last one.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, 271. Isn’t this the same argument dispensationalists use for new circumstances? The superiority argument implies that previous covenants were not effective, were faulty. The inferiority of the previous covenants is argued on the basis that by the time of Christ the people of Israel were “cast once more into the same position that they were before God summoned Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees,” thus necessitating a new covenant to start again the whole process (ibid., 285).

<sup>131</sup> This covenant “shall replace all of God’s previous covenantal dealings” (ibid., 281).

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 275.

<sup>133</sup> “It is not only the new covenant; it is the last covenant” (ibid., 277). Robertson believes that “no possibility exists for an annulment of the new covenant.” This may support another popular principle of “once saved, always saved” (ibid., 285).

<sup>134</sup> The Sanctuary types are seen as inadequate because of repeated sacrifices and because “sin actually was not removed, but only was passed over” (ibid., 283). Robertson claims that, although the Old Testament required a change of heart, “only in the new covenant is provision made for the writing by God himself of the law in the human heart. . . . Nothing under the old covenant had the effectiveness necessary actually to reconcile the sinner to God” (ibid., 291, 292).

In conclusion, covenant theology offers a different basis for mission in the Old Testament than dispensationalism. Although the espoused principle is unity and continuity, there is still too much distinction claimed between covenants. The understanding of the covenant is informed by extra-biblical presuppositions. There is no clear point of departure for covenants and they are not treated equally in terms of conditionality. God seems to have different requirements for salvation in the two Testaments or different covenants, which practically exclude nations other than Israel. Sin does not have the same weight and consequences in all the covenants, while the Holy Spirit seems to be assigned to the New Testament where the superior covenant resides. The basic feature of covenant theology seems to be the superiority of the new over the old. This assumption creates a different God in each Testament.

Covenant theology does not present a comprehensive enough approach to constitute the basis for mission. It still preserves the separation between the Testaments, the covenants, and the ways of salvation, and it assumes the superiority of the newer ones over the older. Mission in the Old Testament is seen as inferior to mission in the New.<sup>135</sup>

### **Supersessionism**

Both dispensationalism and covenant theology share one assumption that influences mission theology: the superiority of the new over the old. The term supersessionism comes from the Latin *supersedere*, which means “to sit upon, to preside

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<sup>135</sup> Walton contends that “the covenant, though a mechanism of revelation, is not an essential ingredient of all revelation. I conclude that there is neither reason nor sufficient evidence for considering the covenant to be the canonical center for Old Testament theology” (*Covenant: God’s Purpose, God’s Plan*, 150). He shows that salvation is the center of revelation. Since the covenant is only the mechanism to reach this goal, mission theology needs a more comprehensive basis than the covenant.

over.” Known also as displacement theology, replacement theology, fulfillment theology, or reconstructionist theology, supersessionism holds that God repudiated the Jewish people because they rejected Christ. As a consequence, God also invalidated the covenant with Israel and made a new and eternal covenant with the Church. The new covenant “fulfills” the old covenant in a way that implies God’s relationship with the Jews ended.

God also replaced the Law of Moses with the Law of Christ, and made Christians the exclusive and rightful heirs of all God’s promises. Supersessionism is found—either explicitly or implicitly—in the teaching that the coming of Christ made Judaism obsolete. Any direct application of an Old Testament passage to the Church implies that Israel is no longer part of the picture, and every Old Testament promise applies directly to God’s people today. At best, supersessionist theology considers Judaism as proto-Christian and Old Testament mission as preparatory for the “real” mission of the New Testament.<sup>136</sup>

Another reflection of supersessionism is found in the claim that the God of the Old Testament is the God of anger and wrath, while the God of the New Testament, the God of Jesus, is the God of love. This view is based on the assumption that Judaism, at the time of Christ, was totally self-righteous, legalistic, and ritualistic, and that Jesus abolished the Jewish law, replacing it with the “law of love.” Christianity, in contrast, represents grace, love, and true worship. Jewish particularism has been described as being parochial and tribal, while Christianity claimed New Testament universalism over the particularism of the Old Testament. Such views may explain why in evangelical

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<sup>136</sup> There is a current trend in academic circles today to substitute “First Testament” and “Second Testament” for the traditional “Old” and “New” Testament, respectively. This new terminology indicates a rejection of the supersessionist promise-to-fulfillment developmental schema that reduces the First Testament to preparation for the Second. See John Goldingay, *Israel’s Faith*, Old Testament Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 15.



theology centripetal mission is associated with the Old Testament, while centrifugal mission is considered superior and restricted to the New Testament.

In summary, three interrelated claims are inherent in supersessionism: (1) the New Testament fulfills the Old Testament; (2) the Church replaces the Jews as God's people; and (3) Judaism is obsolete, its covenant abrogated.<sup>137</sup> All three claims are part of the Testaments' continuity/discontinuity discussion found in dispensationalism and covenant theology.

### **Ecumenical Theology**

Another trend in mission theology is represented by ecumenical theology.<sup>138</sup> After the merging of the International Missionary Council with the World Council of Churches in 1961, the debate between conservative evangelicals and ecumenical missiologists

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<sup>137</sup> Another term used recently in relation to the Messianic Jews is "functional supersessionism." It is argued that, rather than *supplant* social-historical Israel, their standing as physical Israel is *in conjunction with* social-historical Israel. The eternal nature of the covenant with all Israel is the key element debated here. God's covenant with Israel as a corporate people, it is argued, is eternal. It is not in any way supplanted by the church. Some writers claim that only those among the Jewish people that were believers in Messiah could participate in the blessings of the kingdom. There is no real difference between traditional supersessionism and functional supersessionism. The blessings of social-historical Israel, it is claimed, are bestowed upon Messianic Jews alone. Functional supersessionism is also known as the "Two House" theory. Its proponents point to modern-day messianic Jews and argue that because they accept messianic Jews, they have not supplanted Israel. Even their use of Gen 17:5, God's promise to make Abraham "a father of a multitude of nations," calls to mind the church's history of anti-Jewish rhetoric that seeks to prove that Abraham's promised descendants are gentiles, not Jews.

<sup>138</sup> The term "ecumenical" was originally used for the church councils in the first millennia, but became a specialized term for Protestant missions at the beginning of the twentieth century. During the second half of the century it included the Orthodox and Catholic missions, and toward the end of the century targeted the dialogue and unity with non-Christian religions (see S. T. Balasuriya, "Toward a Wider Ecumenism," in *Ecumenical Theology*, ed. Gregory Baum [New York: Paulist Press, 1967], 66-67). Another term with the same content is *conciliar* theology and movement. There is also talk about "post-ecumenical Christianity" which refers to inclusion of the non-Christian religions in mission cooperation (see Rosemary Ruether, "Post-Ecumenical Christianity?" in Baum, *Ecumenical Theology*, 74-82).

deepened.<sup>139</sup> The Congress on the Church's Worldwide Mission at Wheaton in 1966 issued the Wheaton Declaration in which an "antidote" was sought against the influence of ecumenical theology.

One of the basic questions raised by ecumenical mission is, What is mission? "How can one respond creatively to the missionary challenge in today's kaleidoscopic, turbulent world without sacrificing the *sine qua non* of Christian mission? What precisely are the *sine qua nons*?"<sup>140</sup> The very nature of the Church is challenged: Can the Church be equated with mission, or does the Church have a mission? And what is that mission?

The focus of ecumenical theology is Christian unity. Ecumenical mission is supposed to be united. Ecumenical missiologists claim that the missionary movement was "the progenitor of the movement toward Christian unity," and that the missionary Conference at Edinburgh, in 1910, was one of the ecumenical milestones.<sup>141</sup> It is true that the subsequent mission conferences, confronted with the complex situations on the mission fields, emphasized more and more the need for unity. But what kind of unity?

The ecumenical movement does not strongly emphasize doctrine, especially doctrinal differences. Ecumenical theology focuses on unity and dialogue. Since doctrinal discipline was not that important, it was easier for ecumenical missionary organizations

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<sup>139</sup> For a short history of the missionary conferences of the twentieth century and the Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant contribution to the development of the idea of unity, see W. A. Saayman, *Unity and Mission* (Pretoria, South Africa: The University of South Africa, 1984). An Orthodox perspective is found in Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, *In One Body through the Cross: The Princeton Proposal for Christian Unity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003).

<sup>140</sup> Norman A. Horner, "Introduction," in *Protestant Crosscurrents in Mission: The Ecumenical-Conservative Encounter*, ed. Norman A. Horner (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1968), 10.

<sup>141</sup> James A. Scherer, "Ecumenical Mandates for Mission," in Horner, *Protestant Crosscurrents in Mission*, 21.

to work together and emphasize inclusiveness.<sup>142</sup> This feature of ecumenism resulted in the doctrine of inclusivism where everyone is welcome regardless of their doctrinal stance. The IMC was not designed as a doctrinal body, but only as an administrative facilitator for mission dialogue, especially about practical concerns and challenges. The only requirement for inclusion was to recognize Jesus Christ as divine Savior.

The impact of ecumenical mission resulted in the awareness that mission does not deal only with external issues. It had an influence on the very theological foundation of the participants regarding spiritual fellowship. In Scherer's words, "the unity that lies at the basis of ecumenical missions is an essential unity of spirit without a defined consensus."<sup>143</sup> Missionary motivation varies according to the human need of the moment. The focus is no longer on God or the Bible, but on human need and human relations.

Mission theology in the ecumenical perspective is largely uncritical. It does not check on the assumptions each member brings on board. The Bible is read with the main presupposition that it has to support the ecumenical agenda: unity.<sup>144</sup> The basic principles are respect and goodwill, comprehensiveness and inclusiveness, in an undefined

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<sup>142</sup> An initial step for ecumenism was the principle of *comity*—the denominational enclaves organized by geographical regions. The agreement of "non-aggression" led to the delimitation of territory and non-interference (see R. Pierce Beaver, *Ecumenical Beginnings in Protestant World Mission: A History of Comity* [New York: Thomas Nelson, 1962], 15-80).

<sup>143</sup> Scherer, "Ecumenical Mandates for Mission," in Horner, *Protestant Crosscurrents in Mission*, 27. He admits that "missions had a multiple foundation. There was no attempt to ground them solely on a biblical basis. God's offer of salvation, the church's missionary duty, and the world's need of Christ happily coincided. The problematical aspects of mission had to do not with the underlying theology but with the organization and direction of the effort" (ibid., 30).

<sup>144</sup> Such an attempt to read the Bible from a unity perspective is found in Paul A. Crow Jr., *Christian Unity: Matrix for Mission* (New York: Friendship Press, 1982), 29-42. "From the beginning to the end the Old Testament story is one of alienation and reconciliation, brokenness and restored unity" (30).

consensus.<sup>145</sup> The texts that present absolute or exclusive claims are largely overlooked or relegated to their time and place. Each missionary may have a personal interpretation or basis for mission, and the Bible is not read in a literalistic way and not considered infallible. There is limitless freedom for individual or ecclesiastical interpretation.<sup>146</sup>

The crucial effect of the ecumenical assumptions is that the Bible is no longer the exclusive basis for mission.<sup>147</sup> The Trinitarian aspect is used only to emphasize unity in the divinity. Universalism is emphasized and attributed to God, while free choice is not explained.<sup>148</sup> There is a strong emphasis on human needs which creates an imbalance with God's statements. The result is a syncretistic approach where everything that serves the human need and the unity of the participants is welcome. Evangelism and preaching are branded as proselytism and declared unacceptable. Only service qualifies as

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<sup>145</sup> Margaret O'Gara states that, "more than in other areas of research, ecumenical dialogue research calls into play one's willingness to enter into relationships, to risk vulnerability for the sake of the common effort, and to refuse competition as an acceptable mode for serious enquiry" ("The Theological Significance of Friendship in the Ecumenical Movement," in *That the World May Believe*, ed. Michael W. Goheen and Margaret O'Gara [New York: University Press of America, 2006], 126).

<sup>146</sup> Defending ecumenical mission, M. Richard Schaul declares that "in the face of these new developments, our old definitions of where and how we disagree with each other may not be very relevant. The terms evangelical, ecumenical, and so forth, all point to our response to issues raised in the past; what is now important is for us to meet new challenges for which we are all unprepared and which expose the limitations of all our perspectives" ("Toward a Reformulation of Objectives," in Horner, *Protestant Crosscurrents in Mission*, 82). Schaul also claims that "in ecumenical circles an attempt has been made to emphasize certain elements of our biblical and theological heritage which have not been given sufficient attention by those concentrating on 'depth evangelism' and church growth" (ibid., 86). Ecclesiology seems to be such an underemphasized area as well as eschatology.

<sup>147</sup> A critical examination of ecumenical theology may be found in Paul Avis, *Ecumenical Theology and the Elusiveness of Doctrine* (London: SPCK, 1986).

<sup>148</sup> See Jean Stromberg, ed., *Mission and Evangelism: An Ecumenical Affirmation* (Geneva, Switzerland: World Council of Churches, 1983).

mission.<sup>149</sup> However, syncretism does not offer any support or motivation for mission. In contemporary terms, it is “whatever.”

The participants of the Conference at Willingen, in 1952, even advanced the idea that the missionary mandate has to be reformulated, as well as the need to develop a theology of mission based on the ecumenical premises.<sup>150</sup> The motivation should be unity to fulfill the human need, not a particular commissioning.<sup>151</sup> However, the human need varies constantly, so the reformulation is going to be a permanent process. This is frequently presented as incarnational theology. Since every formulation is tentative, not absolute, this approach fits the postmodern philosophy of today very well.

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<sup>149</sup> Harold Lindsell criticizes the ecumenical approach stating that ‘the preaching of the gospel includes proclamation *and* service. Proclamation without service is compassionless; service without proclamation is mere humanitarianism. We must ever be concerned with soul *and* body” (“Mission Imperatives: A Conservative Evangelical Exposition,” in Horner, *Protestant Crosscurrents in Mission*, 73).

<sup>150</sup> Arthur F. Glasser admits that the reaction of the ecumenical movement was due in part to the conservative evangelical neglect of Gen 1-11, the so-called “cultural mandate.” He recognizes that “our theology fails to grapple with culture. Our ethic does not embrace the totality of human endeavor, particularly the cultural pursuit. . . . Much of this neglect of the cultural mandate is in reaction to the gospel movement of the first half of this century” (“Confession, Church Growth, and Authentic Unity,” in Horner, *Protestant Crosscurrents in Mission*, 181, 182). “Conservative evangelicals reject most strongly, however, the popular idea that the gospel needs to be made relevant to modern man” (ibid., 187). This seems to be a reaction against Blauw, who stated that “the evangelization of the world is not a matter of words or activity, but of presence” (*The Missionary Nature of the Church*, 43). Glasser advocated an authentic ecumenism, a unity “in truth and holiness,” a “Christian and ecclesiastical unity” (“Confession, Church Growth, and Authentic Unity,” in Horner, *Protestant Crosscurrents in Mission*, 199-200).

<sup>151</sup> “The mission of the church is that of being present on these frontiers as a witness to what Christ is doing and to the possibilities he opens for man in that situation” (Schaull, “Toward a Reformulation of Objectives,” in Horner, *Protestant Crosscurrents in Mission*, 98). He is concerned that “the Church, by and large, has not kept up with the ongoing influence of Christ in history.” His goal is to create an “authentic secular” existence, not a Christianized one. This is called a step to maturity, while “all efforts to force man back into a religious framework become essentially dehumanizing. . . . Every attempt on the part of the church to keep people in a state of dependence and immaturity, even when done in the name of Christ, is a form of disobedience” (ibid., 99-100).

A new ecclesiology was also called for, stating that “the church is mission” instead of the “mission of the church” paradigm.<sup>152</sup> However, the danger was that, when everything in the church is mission, nothing is mission. Such a generalization creates the premises for theological fuzziness and confusion. Immediate practical concerns are more important than the biblical or theological motivation for mission.<sup>153</sup>

Mission strategy is also problematic for ecumenical mission since it “should reflect the response of the church and the individual Christian to what God is doing in the world.” The very word “strategy” is problematic “because of its overtones of an autonomous design for a humanly initiated enterprise.”<sup>154</sup> Such sensitivity to mission strategy calls into question whether the term could be applied to God at all. The implication is that God does not work in the world with a strategy. Biblical examples, like the detailed instructions given to Gideon when sent on mission, prove otherwise.

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<sup>152</sup> R. R. Reno notes that “the ecumenical process is stalled because the churches cannot square the circle. They cannot articulate their identities as churches, while at the same time admitting they suffer an ecumenical need for unity with others. . . . The more seriously the churches take the imperative of unity, the less capable they become as ecumenical agents” (“The Debilitation of the Churches,” in *The Ecumenical Future*, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jensen [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004], 47).

<sup>153</sup> The unity of the ecumenical movement is still a future goal. The ecumenical movement research bodies illustrate this. See *Crisis and Challenge of the Ecumenical Movement: Integrity and Indivisibility* (Geneva, Switzerland: World Council of Churches, 1994).

<sup>154</sup> David M. Stowe, “Strategy: The Church’s Response to What God Is Doing,” in Horner, *Protestant Crosscurrents in Mission*, 144. It should be noted that the ecumenical movement came strongly to the fore at the same time as the Third wave (or the charismatic movement) took place. It was the normal Pentecostal and charismatic theology to rely on the Spirit’s discovery of the moment. The term “presence” replaced “evangelism” and presence was defined according to the particular context: economic, social, political, etc. Stowe lists as “strategical” principles openness, diversity, unity, and experimentation. The unity was to be expressed by joint survey, joint planning, and joint action (ibid., 174-175). A discussion of the relationship between ecumenism and the Holy Spirit, as well as the *charisma*, may be found in Oscar Cullmann, *Unity through Diversity* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1988).

Ecumenical theology has created a real stir in theological and missionary circles by challenging a redefinition of mission and seeking a clarification of the relationship between mission and the Church.<sup>155</sup> In Van Engen's words, "in our missiological paradigms church and mission must remain in close proximity. . . . But we have also taken note of the dilemma this proximity produced in ecumenical mission theology."<sup>156</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The survey of assumptions influencing the centrifugal-centripetal paradigm of mission indicates that belief in the superiority of the New Testament over the Old creates the main imbalance in the model. Each thematic approach is influenced by or made to support the idea of superiority. Both dispensationalism and covenant theology promote separation and distinction that lead to an imbalanced picture of mission in the Old Testament and in the whole Bible. As a result, the unity of Scripture is affected, the image of God is distorted, and any attempt to create or record a mission theology based on such assumptions is faulty.

From a different perspective, ecumenical theology challenges centrifugal mission in the name of unity, proposing a redefinition of mission as presence and calling proclamation mission "proselytism." As a result, external ideas are imposed on the Bible, especially on the Old Testament, where texts are made to support different personal or group agendas.

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<sup>155</sup> "The relation of church and mission has been one of the most difficult issues vexing missiology during the last sixty years" (Van Engen, *Mission on the Way*, 145).

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 156.

Other presuppositions are present in the debate between scholars advocating predestination and supporters of free will theology. More recently, the whole spectrum of the “political correctness” movement claims the Bible should be read with their presuppositions in mind. Feminist movements, gay movements, and modern historical-criticism claim their right to read the Scripture from their perspectives. These views will not be discussed in this chapter because they go beyond the scope of this dissertation.

One needs to listen carefully to the internal message of the Bible and reconstruct mission in the Old Testament without allowing personal presuppositions to affect the outcome. The remarkable results obtained by using the Old Testament (the Creation, the Fall, and the Sanctuary in particular) to present the gospel to different tribes should be a wakeup call for rediscovering the powerful mission theology of the Old Testament. A holistic biblical theology is needed, based on an approach which will take into consideration the whole Scripture. The following chapter presents some of the major biblical assumptions and pencils in broad strokes a mission theology based on the assumptions found in the text itself.



## CHAPTER 4

### TOWARD A COMPREHENSIVE BIBLICAL FRAMEWORK FOR MISSION THEOLOGY

The analysis of the popular assumptions that influence mission theology in the previous chapter shows the need for the discovery of biblical assumptions. This chapter brings together the major hermeneutical assumptions that impact mission theology found in the biblical text. The assumptions found in the text constitute the background against which the biblical missionary framework is uncovered.

The first part of the chapter addresses the main issues which are particularly affected by the popular assumptions and which in turn influence the resulting mission theology. God's character and the relationship of Israel with the nations are the major areas impacted. God's mercy and justice, and blessings and curses need to be evaluated in the light of the biblical text, as well as the relationship between responsibility and freedom and conditionality in God's process of election. God's character is love, but the popular understanding of love misses some of its major facets, being influenced by a humanist philosophy rather than the biblical text.

The second half of this chapter attempts to build a mission theology framework that brings together the puzzle pieces of the Old Testament. This approach begins with the first chapters of the Bible that are frequently neglected or read with improper assumptions. The dialogue between the text and the reading of the text will be kept open

so the reading informs the hermeneutic, while at the same time the hermeneutic informs the reading of the text.

### **Basic Assumptions**

There is no presuppositionless approach in theology. Any attempt for a mission theology should spell out from the beginning the basic assumptions that constitute the basis of the search for a biblical mission framework. The present attempt will take into consideration the whole text of the Bible, with an emphasis on the Old Testament. In spite of the labels “Old” and “New,” the Bible is a unit, not a compilation of different Testaments. There is both continuity and discontinuity between the Testaments, but continuity is supported by the coherence of the Scripture and by the organic structure of revelation.<sup>1</sup> God is the same in both Testaments, his character does not change. Since God’s mission is part of his nature and character, mission is the same in both Testaments. However, unity does not imply uniformity. Sin is part of the big picture and affects planet earth, as well as the universe.

Any honest attempt to build a mission theology of the Old Testament (and of the whole Bible) should take the process of revelation seriously, recognizing both literality and accommodation language. It has to include God’s character and all his acts, such as creation, judgment, and salvation and all that is revealed from before and after time.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Speaking on the continuity and discontinuity of the Bible, Walter Kaiser replaces discontinuity with diversity. “The theological unity of the Bible celebrates the diversity of the Bible but does so with the conviction that even though that unity can be tested historically, ethically, and otherwise, it has not detracted from the central case for the theological harmony that is found in the text. This has been the general conclusion of two millennia of Judeo-Christian exegesis” (Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Recovering the Unity of the Bible: One Continuous Story, Plan, and Purpose* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009], 33).

<sup>2</sup> See Titus Presler, *Horizons of Mission* (Boston, MA: Cowley, 2001), 33-34.

The total context of the Bible is vital for a correct understanding of God and his works. This implies the need for more attention to the Old Testament which includes more than Jewish history.<sup>3</sup> It is not enough to look for a New Testament mission commission and interpret the Old Testament through that lens. A comprehensive view of both Testaments is required as well as a look at details and a reevaluation of definitions where necessary. Statements such as “progressive revelation is a fact”<sup>4</sup> cannot be accepted until they are checked against the internal consistency of Scripture.<sup>5</sup>

A responsible interpretation will include both the unity and the diversity found in the text, as well as in theological concepts.<sup>6</sup> The Scripture includes many themes that deserve their legitimate place, while an overarching theme has to include all of them and

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<sup>3</sup> “A case for missions forming a central role in the plan of God in the Old Testament can indeed be successfully argued, for an international invitation of the gospel to all nations is explicitly set forth in the Old Testament, and it forms one of the great unifying threads of meaning in the purpose-plan of God” (Kaiser, *Recovering the Unity of the Bible*, 184).

<sup>4</sup> Fred H. Klooster, “The Biblical Method of Salvation: A Case for Continuity,” in Feinberg, *Continuity and Discontinuity*, 144.

<sup>5</sup> Speaking of the recovery of biblical patterns for mission, Samuel Escobar confirms the need to return to Scripture: “It has become evident that the new century will require a return to biblical patterns of mission. . . . It is time for a paradigm change that will come from a salutary return to the Word of God. . . . This effort to find the missionary imperative in the great lines of God’s revelation in both Testaments is part of an ongoing rediscovery of the missionary theme that runs through the Bible. Here we come to a point where Evangelicals must acknowledge: they themselves have a long way to go in terms of deepening their understanding of the biblical basis of mission, in order to establish its validity not on isolated sayings but on the general thrust of Biblical teaching” (Samuel Escobar, “The Global Scenario at the Turn of the Century,” in *Global Missiology for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: The Iguassu Dialogue*, ed. William D. Taylor [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000], 42, 43, 114).

<sup>6</sup> “Reading the Bible meticulously for proof texts and argument, it is possible to escape its unmistakable drift; reading it in the large and simply as it was written, its missionary message is inescapable” (Helen Barrett Montgomery, *The Bible and Missions* [West Medford, MA: The Central Committee on the United Study of Foreign Missions, 1920], 7).

explain their roles.<sup>7</sup> Such a theme will focus on God's plan and purpose in Jesus Christ. Sometimes there will be tensions between concepts or portions of Scripture, but a serious hermeneutical approach will not exclude any of them for the sake of the others. "Old and new stand together and not over against each other (*tota Scriptura*). Moreover, the old is not to be relegated to being secondary, material, and inferior."<sup>8</sup>

Lucien Legrand recommends that "we must begin at the beginning. We must take account of the Old Testament, in spite of its apparently limited missionary perspectives. We may actually discover new perspectives there."<sup>9</sup> Although Christopher Wright admits that Christians generally have a problem reading the Old Testament from a missionary perspective, he shows how Old Testament texts are the result of (or lack of) Israel's engagement with the surrounding nations.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> "The missionary character of the Bible is clearly seen in two great categories: (1) in its essential character; (2) in its expressed purpose and plan. The Bible is in its very subconscious substance missionary. Not only because of what it advocates or purposes or states, but because of what it is, the Bible is the great Missionary Charter of the Church. . . . In its presentation of the character of God lies the final claim of the Bible to universal interest. . . . The whole claim of the Bible to universal reverence might well be staked on this alone, the God whom it reveals" (Montgomery, *The Bible and Missions*, 8, 12).

<sup>8</sup> Willem Van Gemeren, "Systems of Continuity," in Feinberg, *Continuity and Discontinuity*, 62. He recommends that creation be kept in balance with redemption, the old with the new, the material and the spiritual, the temporal and the eschatological, the law with the gospel, the promise with the fulfillment, Israel and the church, as well as both Testaments.

<sup>9</sup> Legrand, *Unity and Plurality*, 1.

<sup>10</sup> "We can see that many of these texts emerged out of the engagement of Israel with the surrounding world in the light of the God they knew in their history and in covenantal relationship. People produced texts in relation to what they believed God had done, was doing, or would do in their world. . . . The Bible, then, is a missiological phenomenon in itself. The writings which now comprise our Bible are themselves the product of, and witness to, the ultimate mission of God. . . . A missional hermeneutic proceeds from the assumption that the whole Bible renders to us the story of God's mission through God's people in their engagement with God's world for the sake of God's purpose for the whole of God's creation" (Christopher Wright, "Truth with a Mission: Reading All Scripture Missiologically," in *Text and Task: Scripture and Mission*, ed. Michael Parsons [Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2005], 143).

One should seek an understanding of mission that comes out of the Bible with no attempt to mold the Bible according to preconceived ideas.<sup>11</sup> Any attempt to follow a particular agenda that requires the use of only some of the biblical texts must be avoided.<sup>12</sup> Such attempts cannot offer a complete and balanced view of biblical mission. On the other hand, since there is no presuppositionless approach to the Bible,<sup>13</sup> one must make sure that the presuppositions used reflect the framework of the entire Word of God.<sup>14</sup> We must discover God's mission, not support for our understanding of mission.

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<sup>11</sup> The denominational agenda took precedence over the Bible: "We must acknowledge that often we have also set our Evangelical traditions above Scripture. In many instances our lip service to biblical authority contradicts the predominant place we give to our denominational and historical baggage. . . . Some of the more difficult dialogues and debates within the Evangelical Movement are related to the corrective role of Scripture in relation to missionary practice" (Samuel Escobar, "Evangelical Missiology," in Taylor, *Global Missiology*, 114, 115).

<sup>12</sup> "If we wish to reflect on 'biblical foundations for mission,' our point of departure should not be the contemporary enterprise we seek to justify, but the biblical sense of what being sent into the world signifies. . . . However important single biblical texts may [seem to] be, the validity of mission should not be deduced from isolated sayings but from the thrust of the central message of Scripture" (David Bosch, "Reflections on Biblical Models of Mission," in *Toward the 21<sup>st</sup> Century in Christian Mission: Essays in Honor of Gerald H. Anderson*, ed. J. M. Phillips and R. T. Coote [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993], 177). It is noteworthy that some mission books even debut with the statement "The history of missions begins with Abraham" (Bengt Sundkler, *The World of Mission* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1965], 11).

<sup>13</sup> Elmer A. Martens launches his model, "God's design," by recognizing that the proposal "assumes that it is legitimate to examine the Old Testament in search of a single central message." However, Martens admits that in his book "the answer to the question about the central message is derived from a specific set of texts" (*God's Design*, 4). Jiri Moskala also notices that "the modern reader of the Hebrew Scripture might have different questions and expectations than one can readily find answered in the biblical text" ("The Mission of God's People in the Old Testament," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 19, no. 1-2 (2008): 41.

<sup>14</sup> The need for a reevaluation of mission theology in the light of the Bible has been recognized both in the Lausanne Declaration and in the Iguassu Affirmation. "We confess that our biblical and theological reflection has sometimes been shallow and inadequate. We also confess that we have frequently been selective in our use of texts rather than being faithful to the whole biblical revelation" ("The Iguassu Affirmation," in *Global Missiology for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: The Iguassu Dialogue*, ed. William D. Taylor [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000], 19). Chris Wright concurs: "A major missiological task for Evangelical theology will be a fresh articulation of the authority of the Bible and its relation to Christ's authorization of our mission" ("Christ and the Mosaic of Pluralisms," in Taylor, *Global Missiology*, 76).

## A Missionary God

Most scholars agree that human mission flows out of *missio Dei*, or God's mission. However, there is no uniform understanding of God's mission among scholars.<sup>15</sup> This is a natural result of different understandings of God and his character. "What we think of God will determine what we think of everything else."<sup>16</sup> Influenced by humanistic ideas, some believe God is only love, and his mission is simply to bless and save. As a result, God in the Old Testament seems to be radically different from God in the New Testament. If mission is defined as sending only to bless ("As the Father has sent me, so I send you"),<sup>17</sup> certain sendings in the Old Testament become problematic. An imbalanced view of God's character will produce an imbalanced view of mission in Scripture. *Missio Dei* can simply be defined as God's character in action.

There is no place in the "blessing" view for passages such as Gen 19 where messengers are sent to Sodom and Gomorrah in order to destroy the cities. The blessing can hardly be justified in the destruction of the two cities. The same applies to other passages such as Exod 32:25-29; Num 25:16-18; 31:7; Josh 11:11-15, 20; or 1 Sam 15:1-3 where Israel is sent to wipe out entire nations from the face of the earth. In each instance God is the initiator of the sending and the mission is expressed in clear terms.

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<sup>15</sup> Van Engen admits that "although we may agree that it is important for missiologists to deal with the whole of Scripture as a diverse unity, we are in need of a hermeneutical method that enables us to do that. We cannot have mission without the Bible, nor can we understand the Bible apart from God's mission" ("The Relation of Bible and Mission in Mission Theology," in *The Good News of the Kingdom: Mission Theology for the Third Millennium*, ed. Charles Van Engen, Dean S. Gilliland, and Paul Pierson [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993], 29).

<sup>16</sup> Howard Peskett and Vinoth Ramachandra, *The Message of Mission: The Glory of Christ in All Time and Space* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 27.

<sup>17</sup> John 20:21.

There is no explanation or justification for Elijah killing the prophets of Baal in 1 Kgs 18:40 if one uses the “blessing” model. His mission was clearly restoring God’s honor and glory among Israel and the nations. Many people find it very difficult to reconcile these sendings and actions with the picture of a loving and blessing God. However, all these passages indicate God’s commissioning and sending, and are part of God’s mission.

### Mercy and Justice (Righteousness)

Although God is love and manifests his love towards humans, God is also just and righteous and his righteousness requires firm intervention when his love is rejected or ridiculed.<sup>18</sup> The Psalmist delights in the fact that God’s justice is a missionary message that needs to be made known. “My mouth will tell of your righteousness, of your salvation all day long, though I know not its measure. I will come and proclaim your mighty acts, O Sovereign LORD; I will proclaim your righteousness, yours alone.”<sup>19</sup> God’s justice and righteousness attract the nations. His character becomes the magnet that attracts but is also the sending motivation for those who have tasted God’s attributes.

All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him, for dominion belongs to the LORD and he rules over the nations. All the rich of the earth will feast and worship; all who go down to the dust will kneel before him—those who cannot keep themselves alive. Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord. They will proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn—for he has done it.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> This tension constitutes the biggest problem in reconciling God’s biblical image with the modern humanistic worldview. See Elmer Martens, “God, Justice, and Religious Pluralism in the Old Testament,” in *Practicing Truth: Confident Witness in Our Pluralistic World*, ed. David Shenk and Linford Stutzman (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1999), 46-63.

<sup>19</sup> Ps 71:15-16.

<sup>20</sup> Ps 22:27-31.

It is no wonder that the psalms express God's love, his righteousness, faithfulness, and justice in balance. "Love and faithfulness meet together; righteousness and peace kiss each other. Faithfulness springs forth from the earth, and righteousness looks down from heaven."<sup>21</sup> "Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; love and faithfulness go before you. Blessed are those who have learned to acclaim you, who walk in the light of your presence, O LORD. They rejoice in your name all day long; they exult in your righteousness."<sup>22</sup>

The prophets and the psalmists refer back to Creation when they describe God's righteousness. When creating, God was already on a mission, working toward a goal, being satisfied and resting content with the result. His creation was declared "good" at every phase; there was no progression and no imperfection. Each stage was part of his mission to create beings who would reflect his image and be able to share his character and mission. The creation of human beings with a free will was a response to Satan's accusation that God was a tyrant who does not allow his creatures or subjects to think or know.<sup>23</sup> Part of God's mission in this case was to prove he is correct and just. The controversies about the historicity of Genesis have distracted the attention of scholars

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<sup>21</sup> Ps 85:10-11.

<sup>22</sup> Ps 89:14-16. There is no difference between Israel and the nations when it comes to God's justice and mercy. "The LORD has made his salvation known and revealed his righteousness to the nations. He has remembered his love and his faithfulness to the house of Israel; all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth, burst into jubilant song with music; make music to the LORD with the harp, with the harp and the sound of singing, with trumpets and the blast of the ram's horn—shout for joy before the LORD, the King. Let the sea resound, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it. Let the rivers clap their hands, let the mountains sing together for joy; let them sing before the LORD, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples with equity" (Ps 98:2-9).

<sup>23</sup> Gen 3:5.



from the original goal of God, so it is no wonder that so many do not see any mission in the first eleven chapters of Genesis.<sup>24</sup>

God continues to demonstrate he is totally committed to his mission when choosing Abraham as his agent. Since Abraham has to share God's character with other people, he has to experience it first. God is taking Abraham on a seven-step journey that helps the chosen one to trust his divine partner.<sup>25</sup> Upon returning from liberating his nephew, Lot, and the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham gave tithe to Melchizedek, the priest of God Most High, who blessed God for making justice.<sup>26</sup>

Years after being commissioned, entering the covenant with God, and receiving many blessings Abraham is sent to sacrifice Isaac on Mount Moriah. This order to kill can hardly be classified as a blessing, although it is clearly God's commissioning.<sup>27</sup> On the mountain top, Abraham learned the most important lesson about God's justice and mercy in the covenant. Through the ram replacing Isaac, God taught Abraham that justice needs to be fulfilled if God's character is going to be correctly portrayed. The blessing

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<sup>24</sup> Walter Kaiser comes closer when he says that "even before God began to call any of the patriarchs or even the nation of Israel, the bent of revelation during the first eleven chapters of the Bible (that must cover at least as much time as the rest of the entire Old Testament) was aimed at all the nations of the world. It was universal in its scope" (Kaiser, *Recovering the Unity of the Bible*, 184).

<sup>25</sup> Paul Borgman, *The Story We Haven't Heard* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 41-132. See also Paul R. Williamson, *Abraham, Israel and the Nations: The Patriarchal Promise and Its Covenantal Development in Genesis* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic, 2000), 218-219. Williamson parallels Gen 12:1-9 with Gen 22:1-19 and shows how they form an *inclusio* for the Abraham narrative.

<sup>26</sup> Gen 14:20.

<sup>27</sup> Speaking about Ps 145, Wright is willing to admit only that justice "is a sad but necessary dimension of God's own protection of the love that longs to bring blessing to all. It is the implication of one part of the Abrahamic covenant" (*The Mission of God*, 235).

Abraham was called to share with others was God's wholesome and consistent character. His justice and mercy were reflected in the sacrifices on the altars Abraham built.<sup>28</sup>

When God describes his plans to Abraham, he reassures the chosen missionary instrument that the oppressor of his seed will not go unpunished. His justice is the basis of the covenant.<sup>29</sup> The balance between God's justice and mercy is shown in the words describing the state of the Amorites: "In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure."<sup>30</sup> God's judgment followed centuries of God's mercy.<sup>31</sup>

All the other patriarchs had to learn about God's love and righteousness. Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and his brothers—all were tested in regard to justice. Joseph, for example, goes through an excruciating experience and questions God's impartiality. However, his trust in God is rewarded and Joseph is later able to share God's justice and mercy with the Egyptians, the surrounding nations, and with his own brothers.

Both Moses and Israel go through difficult times when God seems to be remote, hidden, and his character is doubted. But the divine intervention reassures them that God remains the same, a just and merciful God. Their experience will be told again and again as a powerful missionary message, inviting the nations to accept the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Israel), the only just and merciful God.

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<sup>28</sup> Gen 22:17-18. See also Gen 12:7, 8; 13:4, 18.

<sup>29</sup> Gen 15:14.

<sup>30</sup> Gen 15:16.

<sup>31</sup> Some scholars resolve the tension by simply projecting God's blessing and judgment as an eschatological expectation and purpose. See for example Christopher J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 473.

During human history under sin, God's mission is to restore his glory by winning back the human race, all while allowing free will for human beings and free choice. However, God has to cleanse the earth to maintain justice.<sup>32</sup> Judgment is called into action when sin is about to destroy humanity and the earth.<sup>33</sup> Both Moses and Jonah are sent to announce God's judgments, but only after allowing time for repentance and abandonment of the evil practices. The different answers in these two cases indicate that God is interested in saving, not destroying, and that the final judgment is decided by humans' choice. The same sending for judgment is present in the case of Sodom and Gomorrah where choice is again offered.<sup>34</sup>

An in-depth analysis of God's character in such passages is necessary because "it shows why it is justified to employ otherwise extravagant concepts about God."<sup>35</sup> An accurate reflection of God will influence our understanding of mission and become a reference point for the missionary methods employed.

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<sup>32</sup> In addition to erasing certain nations from the earth, "YHWH authorized the Israelites to punish individuals who violated his commandments. Needless to say, when this was capital punishment (e.g., Lev 24:13-23; Num 15:32-36), it purged the offender from the community. At least in some cases, destroying the sinners could spare the community from God's wrath. . . . The role of the Levites as cultic personnel served as an ongoing reminder of YHWH's retributive justice" (Roy Gane, *Cult and Character: Purification Offerings, Day of Atonement, and Theodicy* [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005], 331).

<sup>33</sup> Herbert Kane identifies God's sovereignty as manifested in his divine activities: creation, redemption, and judgment. "Nowhere is the sovereignty of God more clearly seen than in the Christian mission, and this in several ways" (*Understanding Christian Missions*, 87). DuBose recognizes in Genesis alone "half dozen references mostly in the providential, judgmental, and generally redemptive mood reflective of a pre-Exodian salvific concept. . . . The Exodus salvation did not take place without God's judgment" (*God Who Sends*, 41, 42). Later, DuBose refers to God as the "Judge who Sends" (62).

<sup>34</sup> "We are about to destroy this place, for the outcry reaching the LORD against those in the city is so great that he has sent us to destroy it" (Gen 19:13). The angels are on God's mission.

<sup>35</sup> Kirk, *What Is Mission?* 26.

## Blessings and Curses

The story of God's commissioning of Abraham fits the general understanding of God because it speaks of blessings. The text, however, also cites curses. When Moses gives Joshua and Israel God's instructions for righteous living in Canaan, that message contains both blessings and curses. Keith Grüneberg notes that "in the Old Testament there is no sign that the operation of curses could be independent of Yhwh."<sup>36</sup>

The same combination of blessings and curses is repeated and remembered in many passages in the book of Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy 27-32 is an anticipation of Israel's future. The book begins and ends with failure. Curses are an integral part of the covenant. Israel has to be scattered and taken into exile as part of God's covenant.<sup>37</sup> In Van Engen's words, "this relationship involved both blessing and cursing, two sides of the same covenant which spelled out Israel's nature as the special people of YHWH. . . . At the same time Israel became increasingly conscious of the fact that God was not to be owned or controlled."<sup>38</sup>

God allows free choice, but announces his plans for each option. He does not plan to fail in his mission. As a result, he provides a painful reminder and opportunity for

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<sup>36</sup> Keith N. Grüneberg, *Abraham, Blessing and the Nations* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), 96.

<sup>37</sup> However, curses do not indicate a vengeful side of God, as popular theology suggests. Curses describe most of the time the natural consequences of the choices humans make. In an era of military expansion, any nation which self-destructed or became weak due to lack of values and morals was going to end up either wiped out or decimated. The exile and the existence of a preserved remnant show that although God allows natural consequences to happen, he is still merciful. God's mercy and justice are preserved in blessings and curses.

<sup>38</sup> Charles Van Engen, *God's Missionary People: Rethinking the Purpose of the Local Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1991), 103. Van Engen notes that "to be the people of YHWH meant a commitment to be an instrument on behalf of all the nations within the universal scope of YHWH's lordship over all the world" (ibid.).

Israel to fulfill its mission. God wants to bless, but does not force the blessing on people. The psalmists and the prophets refer equally to blessings and curses. In fact, the first references to blessings in Genesis are joined by the possible consequences of wrong human choices, which are usually presented as curses.<sup>39</sup>

Curses also have a motivational and pedagogical role. Roy Gane indicates that “as a persuasive rhetorical strategy for motivating compliance, the positive and negative reinforcement of blessings and curses . . . will give the people an opportunity to make a clear choice to follow the Lord or not (cf. Deut 30:15-18).” It will also “help the people to understand the cause of their distress, such as exile, if they are punished for their disobedience. . . . By grasping the reason for their distress, some have hope for restoration by turning back to God (Dan 9; cf. Deut 30:1-3).”<sup>40</sup> The “fear of the Lord” is not necessarily negative, but the “beginning of knowledge” (Prov 1:7).

### Freedom and Responsibility

A widespread belief affirms that God’s first mission grew out of the fall of the first humans. However, the Bible reveals that sin entered the universe earlier than the Creation event. Isaiah 14:12-14 describes the moment when Lucifer became Satan by coveting God’s glory. Because God is just and merciful at the same time, he had to allow his created beings to choose whom they wanted to follow and obey. Although it may

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<sup>39</sup> Gen 1:28, 29; 2:16, 17; 3:14-24. Andrew Schmutzer observes that “God’s acts of blessing are not coerced, assisted, or preempted in any way. There is no initial cause or divine obligation requiring God to bless. Particularly in Gen 1-11, the blessing of God follows creative or restorative (i.e., re-creative) acts. Following his creation (Gen 1-2), Gen 3-11 stresses God’s counter-active measures to human hubris” (*Be Fruitful and Multiply: A Crux of Thematic Repetition in Genesis 1-11* [Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2009], 70-71).

<sup>40</sup> Roy Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 458.

seem strange, God had to allow humans to be tempted in the Garden of Eden in order to respect their power of choice and to prove to Satan, the accuser, that the triune God is just and fair at the same time. The subtle words of the Serpent to Eve are revelatory: “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”<sup>41</sup>

The same accusation is repeated when Satan targets Job. Satan is aiming at God when he says "Skin for skin! . . . A man will give all he has for his own life. But stretch out your hand and strike his flesh and bones, and he will surely curse you to your face.”<sup>42</sup> God is accused of not being just and fair, of favoring Job because of the blessings received. God is willing to test Job in order to prove his own character.

Mission implies free choice on the part of those invited to know God. When humans fell, God implemented a new dimension to his mission in addition to his creating and sustaining activities: rescuing and restoring those affected by sin. God’s mission reflected his character from the beginning. And since humans were created in God’s image, he seeks to restore that image.<sup>43</sup> This is the essence of the promise in Gen 3:15. As DuBose points out, “the method behind the recovery of the *imago Dei* is the *missio Dei*—the incipient sending of Genesis and the ultimate sending of the New Covenant.”<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Gen 3:5.

<sup>42</sup> Job 2:4-5.

<sup>43</sup> “Clearly redemption cannot be understood in a man-centered fashion. God’s glory as the great Creator has been assaulted. His handiwork has been disharmonized. Not simply for the sake of man, but for the glory of God redemption is undertaken” (Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, 95).

<sup>44</sup> DuBose, *God Who Sends*, 80.

Mission is articulated by sending. The theological language of God's sending in the Bible, and particularly in the Old Testament, is expressed in three forms: God's creative-providential, judgmental, and saving work, with some references combining the providential and salvific meanings in the context of events describing the larger redemptive purposes of God. Although there is no clear language indicating mission in Gen 3, DuBose recognizes the idea and the pattern of mission.

God was on a mission to Adam. He had no other man to send, so he sent himself (later he would send himself as a man to bring the ultimate message of redemption). The Genesis mission which paves the way for all subsequent missions is the 'incipient sending.' God is the 'source' and 'medium' (agent), and his first redemptive promise to man is the 'purpose.' The *proto-missio* (the 'original mission') precedes the *proto-evangelium* (the 'original gospel') of Gen 3:15. What flowers ultimately in all Scripture has its roots in this primal mission and the purpose behind it.<sup>45</sup>

Wright concurs that the key assumption of a missional hermeneutic of the Bible is "to accept that the biblical worldview locates us in the midst of a narrative of the universe behind which stands the mission of the living God."<sup>46</sup>

### Chosen for God's Service

Israel was created as a nation and chosen in order to become an instrument in God's three-fold mission. Israel's *only* reason for existence was mission and service.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> DuBose, *God Who Sends*, 57.

<sup>46</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God*, 64. However, the limitations that Wright imposes on reading the Old Testament shape from the beginning the result of the study. "Our focus here is not on all texts that refer in any way to YHWH and the nations but on those that articulate some element of universality, either directly or implicitly echoing the Abraham promise" (ibid., 223). This limitation restricts God to a singular method of dealing with the nations, among which Israel is found.

<sup>47</sup> "Israel is not so much the *object* of divine election as *subject* in the service asked for by God on the ground of election (Blauw, *The Missionary Nature of the Church*, 23). Bosch agrees that "when this [service] is withheld, election loses its meaning (*Transforming Mission*, 18).

But Israel's mission was not its own mission nor its own service. Israel was chosen to serve God and fulfill his mission. God's ultimate goal was to reach all nations and expand and restore his kingdom.<sup>48</sup> When Jesus came into this world, he made it clear that his agenda was his Father's agenda.<sup>49</sup> God's will and mission determined his mission.

By implication, it seems only natural that human mission is a reflection of God's character as shown in Jesus. "When you know who God is, when you know who Jesus is, witnessing mission is the unavoidable outcome."<sup>50</sup> One may plan one's actions or think of them as one's own initiative, but the Bible makes it very clear that mission belongs to God. It is his initiative, and he is the right owner of it. Humans are just invited to join in. As guests, they have no right to set the mission agenda or decide the way to do mission, but are given the choice to accept or reject God's agenda and mission.

When God is the source of mission, every missionary activity originates in him. This reality affects the relationship between church and mission. As Wright expresses it, "it is not so much the case that God has a mission for his church in the world but that God has a church for his mission in the world. Mission was not made for the church; the church was made for mission—God's mission."<sup>51</sup> The church's ecclesiology should correctly reflect this rapport.

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<sup>48</sup> Johannes Verkuyl maintains that "in choosing Israel as segment of all humanity, God never took his eye off the other nations; Israel was the *pars pro toto*, a minority called to serve the majority" (*Contemporary Missiology: An Introduction* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978], 92).

<sup>49</sup> Luke 2:49, 52.

<sup>50</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God*, 66.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.



Since God's glory is the ultimate purpose of mission, it is only natural that his whole character should be reflected in his mission. God's transcendence indicates that his involvement in the biblical story happens from the outside. On the other hand, his immanence shows that he continues his mission, which is a permanent mission. God's character, expressed by love and justice, is mirrored in his mission: creation, judgment, and salvation. He blesses, corrects, and redeems.

By creating and providing, he is voluntarily involved in the lives of his creation. It is the basis of his character. The Old Testament (the prophets in particular) implies frequently that God's judgmental decrees and acts are also proceeding from him. But God does not just send out his word and judgments, he also acts and his actions are redemptive. The Incarnation is one example in which the Word became flesh and lived among humans, serving them and paying the highest price to see them saved. The Word of God always attends the acts of God without which it remains a simple abstraction. His ultimate sending is his salvific sending.

### **Israel and the Nations**

Humanity is God's object of love. Because sin has affected his relationship with humans, his desire is to restore it. In order to accomplish his goal he either sends himself or chooses a messenger or an instrument to carry out his word or his actions.<sup>52</sup> Abraham

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<sup>52</sup> God uses angels as emissaries, as well as different elements of the created nature. Kane shows that God uses a divine-human cooperation pattern in mission. "The Old Testament is replete with examples of divine-human cooperation. God always achieve His purpose, but seldom without the cooperation of His people" (*Understanding Christian Mission*, 98). Among such examples are Noah, Moses, David, Nebuchadnezzar, and Esther. Roger E. Hedlund recognizes that "election involves both calling and sending. . . . Election has a missionary dimension" (*God and the Nations: A Biblical Theology of Mission in the Asian Context* [Dehli, India: ISPCK, 1997], 25).

is chosen to become God's representative in a world corrupted by sin. Israel is the messenger sent to bring the blessings to all other peoples around them. Finally, God sends "his only begotten son" to accomplish the desired redemption of humanity.

All his chosen ones are sent to the nations, in the real world.<sup>53</sup> However, anytime Israel forgot the reason for election, the redemptive mission was in danger. Israel's actions became self-centered; its worship became a litany of hypocritical requests and statements of self-justification. The very reason for election was forgotten and God's mission was jeopardized. Israel not only forgot the reason for its existence, but became anti-missionary, presenting the nations with a distorted image of God. John P. Dickson argues for an ambivalent attitude of the Jews toward gentiles, questioning whether "this ambivalence toward Gentiles should be interpreted in a missionary way."<sup>54</sup>

Israel was never intended to be God's unique focus. In Herbert Kane's words, "God's missionary concern was by no means confined to Israel. He was equally interested in the welfare of the nations. They too belonged to Him even though they were not part of the covenant. They too were required to repent and acknowledge the universal rule of Jehovah."<sup>55</sup> Carl Henry identifies the problem: "Israel knew her origin was as a people set apart by God's covenant. Yet the Old Testament affirms that Yahweh is King of all peoples (Jer. 10:7; cf. Rev. 15:3). Because of their prideful deviation from the

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<sup>53</sup> Wright notes that "the theme of the nations has not been given the prominence it deserves in biblical scholarship and writing. Yet it is unquestionably one of the major themes of the Bible. And God's plan for the nations of humanity is an integral part of the biblical doctrine of salvation" (Christopher J. H. Wright, *Salvation Belongs to Our God* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007], 146).

<sup>54</sup> Dickson, *Mission-Commitment in Ancient Judaism*, 15.

<sup>55</sup> Kane, *The Christian World Mission*, 18.

service of the living God, and, because of their perverted mission, the nations invite God's wrath and condemnation upon themselves and execute it on each other."<sup>56</sup>

### The Centrifugal-Centripetal Balance

There is a widespread belief that the nations were supposed to come to Jerusalem.<sup>57</sup> While it is true that some foreigners visited Jerusalem and even took dust with them from Canaan back to their countries,<sup>58</sup> there is no evidence that a radical religious reform took place outside the territory of Israel as a result of such centripetal mission. Some believe that "the ingathering of the nations was the very thing Israel existed for in the purpose of God; it was the fulfillment of the bottom line of God's promise to Abraham."<sup>59</sup> But such gathering was not necessarily a positive sign in itself. When history begins only from Abraham, important lessons are missed.

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<sup>56</sup> Carl F. H. Henry, "Theology of Mission and Changing Political Situations," in *Theology and Mission*, ed. David J. Hesselgrave (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1978), 277.

<sup>57</sup> Bengt Sundkler seems to be the one who introduced the centrifugal-centripetal terminology in mission theory (*The World of Mission*, 15). For example, Michael A. Grisanti, who shares the above view, maintains that "non-Jews were invited to come and see what God was doing with His servant nation, Israel." However, he claims that the Old Testament is missing a missionary mandate ("The Missing Mandate," in *Missions in a New Millennium: Change and Challenges in World Missions*, ed. W. Edward Glenny and William H. Smallman [Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2000], 44).

<sup>58</sup> 2 Kgs 5:17.

<sup>59</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God*, 194. Verkuyl notices that "virtually every author who attempts to explain this call to Israel comes up with the concept of presence." But he also remarks that "since the Second World War a number of missiologists have urged Christian presence as one of the leading methods of engaging in today's mission work [i.e., Calvin E. Shenk]. For a variety of reasons and in a variety of manners, they claim that the most suitable form of witness lies in simply being a specific kind of people while living among other people. . . . However, I do not believe it is correct to view the missionary motif only in terms of the concept of presence. I simply do not understand why various writers make such a point of avowing that the Old Testament makes absolutely no mention of a missionary mandate. . . . In my opinion this is an exaggeration" (*Contemporary Missiology*, 94).

The story of Babel is one example of gathering by people seeking to make a name for themselves against God's intentions. God had to scatter them.<sup>60</sup> In fact, God's initial mission for humans was to "fill" the earth to its ends. The same commission is given to Noah and his sons after the flood. The centrifugal spreading is encouraged as opposed to the gathering at Babel or in the cities built by Cain in rebellion (Gen 4:17). While gathering seems to be a natural tendency of humanity under sin, centrifugal spreading appears to be a countermeasure. Although the people who left the land of Shinar did not see it as a blessing but as a punishment, the results proved to be a blessing in disguise—grace on God's part. It was an involuntary going, as later experienced by Israel in exile. Abraham's call took place against the background of disobedient centripetal gatherings.

Instead of preserving the centrifugal-centripetal balance, Israel focused on itself and forgot that God's blessings needed to be taken to the nations. By doing so, Israel misrepresented God. The perfectly balanced picture of God's character in the Old Testament was perverted. He sends and attracts. The movement is both centrifugal and centripetal. When Israel forgot one of the movements, the imbalance prompted God to speak and act, both in a judgmental and salvific way.

Combining his judgmental and redemptive purposes, God sent Israel into exile so they could fulfill their forgotten mission. Instead of a wake-up call and a second chance, Israel interpreted this sending as a judgment and considered that God had turned his face

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<sup>60</sup> Keith N. Grüneberg prefers to call it "a dispersal," a neutral "spreading abroad," not a scattering, which might induce a negative connotation. He indicates that the "dispersal may be more an enforced fulfillment of the divine mandate to fill the earth than a punishment" (*Abraham, Blessing and the Nations*, 133).

from them.<sup>61</sup> In a foreign land, where people asked them to sing Zion's songs, they could only hang up their harps and wail.<sup>62</sup>

The Israelites missed their calling. They thought God elected and blessed for who they were, and this election would never cease because God is faithful to his word within the covenant.<sup>63</sup> However, God reminded them this was not the case.<sup>64</sup> He indicated they were a priestly nation, mediators of redemption to the nations.<sup>65</sup> God also showed them

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<sup>61</sup> Israel "was not morally superior. . . . Yhwh was expelling the land's previous inhabitants because of their faithlessness (Deut 9:4-5). This faithlessness expressed itself in abhorrent practices such as the sacrifice of children, forms of divination (which were allowed to the nations but forbidden to Israel) and inquiring of the dead (of which perhaps the same was true) (Deut 18:9-14). But Israel itself is characterized by faithlessness (Deut 9:27). It has a stiff neck (Deut 9:6), unwilling to turn in the direction Yhwh wishes. Such characteristics imperil its possession of the land as surely as they imperiled the Canaanites' possession of it. The claim that Yhwh owns the land but gives it to Israel might function ideologically, justifying Israel's taking it from other peoples" (John Goldingay, *Israel's Faith*, 213-214).

<sup>62</sup> Ps 137:1-4.

<sup>63</sup> "The nations will not be blessed in some automatic fashion, however" (A. Scott Moreau, Gary R. Corwin, and Gary B. McGee, eds., *Introducing World Missions: A Biblical, Historical, and Practical Survey* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004], 32).

<sup>64</sup> Deut 7:6-7. Hans K. LaRondelle maintains that, from the beginning, Israel had a dual identity: religious and ethnic. The primary meaning of the name "Israel" was spiritual. As a result, "Israel's ethnic and geographic purposes are subordinated to the purpose of saving mankind and not to a different and independent goal" (*The Israel of God in Prophecy: Principles of Prophetic Interpretation* [Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1983], 83, 91). James LaGrand concurs, stating that "throughout the Hebrew Bible, 'Israel' is a theological concept: 'the people of God'. . . . The name 'Israel' itself can be understood as a patronymic, an identification of this people as 'children of the God who rules'" (*The Earliest Christian Mission to 'All Nations'* [Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1995], 48, 49).

<sup>65</sup> "While Israel was to be uniquely related to God, it was to be a kingdom of priests in this world and for this world but not of this world. It is a simple fact that no priesthood exists for itself. . . . What the tribe of Levi was to the people of Israel, Israel as a nation was to be to the nations of the world. The *Missio Dei* was to be mediated through the people of Israel to the world of mankind. Israel's calling was of world significance and for a world ministry" (George W. Peters, "Missions in Biblical Perspective," in *Vital Mission Issues: Examining Challenges and Changes in World Evangelism*, ed. Roy B. Zuck [Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1998], 13-14).

very clearly that Israel is not the only people loved by God.<sup>66</sup> He even sent the prophet Elijah to anoint the king of a nation that Israel saw as their enemy.<sup>67</sup>

In times of trouble, during the Babylonian exile, God used Cyrus as his messiah to restore the nation of Israel, although only a remnant headed back to Jerusalem in spite of the decree allowing the Jews to return home. The Old Testament frequently presents the nations as God's children, while Israel is just one among them. God wanted Israel to be involved in his service to the nations; Israel saw itself as the favorite among the nations.<sup>68</sup>

### Chosen to Be a Stranger

God chose Israel to be his partner in covenant, partner in character and actions toward both disadvantaged categories of people inside the nation and among other nations outside Israel. The two parallel doxologies in Deut 10:14-19 indicate that what God is doing for Israel is the same thing he is doing for aliens and all marginalized

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<sup>66</sup> Robert C. Linthicum notes that "the evangelistic proclamation is not strongly developed in the Old Testament, primarily because the Israelites sought to maintain the purity and integrity of their nation. They perceived themselves as a "peculiar" people, unlike the other nations around them, both because of their worship of Yahweh (rather than the Canaanite, Mesopotamian, and Egyptian deities) and because of their committal to a law of code which stressed covenantal responsibility, not individual license. It was not that Gentiles could not become a part of Israel; they certainly could and often did (e.g., Ruth the Moabitess who became the forebear of Israel's greatest king). It was simply that they were not sought" (*City of God, City of Satan: A Biblical Theology of the Urban Church* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1991], 178).

<sup>67</sup> 1 Kgs 19:15.

<sup>68</sup> John Power, claiming that mission was only an "ideal" in the Old Testament, excuses Israel's non-missionary approach precisely by its elect status. He somehow blames election for the fact that the nations saw Israel as an arrogant enemy. "In all her history Israel experienced no friendship, no outstretched helping hand; hers was a lonely struggle for survival. . . . Israel's consciousness of her uniqueness as the one chosen race of Yahweh, and her incessant struggle for survival, combined to form a kind of siege mentality and an inward-looking, Jerusalem-centered religion that could not succeed in blossoming into a missionary mentality" (*Mission Theology Today* [Dublin, Ireland: Gill and Macmillan, 1970], 63). Goldingay notes that "choosing Israel does not mean that Yhwh rejected the rest of the peoples of the world. They were created by Yhwh and they live in Yhwh's world" (*Israel's Faith*, 733).

people. “YHWH is the God who loves to love, and especially to love the needy and the alien.”<sup>69</sup> Part of the sacrifices, gifts, and offerings, which people brought to the priests and Levites, were shared with the foreigner and the alien. Even God’s people are described as “strangers and wanderers on earth.”

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were all “foreigners (*ger*) in a strange land.” Abraham was called by God to go to an unknown destination, and so become a “blessing to all nations.” Abraham is even told that his descendants will inherit the land only after a long period of oppression as foreigners and strangers in Egypt. Like the prophets later on, Abraham was called from ordinary tasks to take up the challenge of God. Webber points out that “whenever God calls, he has work for us to do which disrupts the familiar, traditional patterns of our lives. He gives us an inner freedom that makes us available to serve Him.”<sup>70</sup>

Abraham welcomes three strangers exemplifying all the elaborate biblical legislation for the reception and protection of foreigners. He is a stranger himself, so he can identify with his guests. Abraham not only serves his guests, but he negotiates with one of them in behalf of the cities in the valley. Abraham’s identity as a foreigner enables him to mediate for the nations. He joins in God’s mission.

It is interesting that one does not have to conquer foreign nations in order to be able to witness to them. The opposite seems to be true: You witness to foreigners from a

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<sup>69</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God*, 80.

<sup>70</sup> George W. Webber, *Today’s Church: A Community of Exiles and Pilgrims* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1979), 15. Speaking about the relationship between the exiles and Christ, Michael Frost concludes that the “exiles are inspired by visions, ideas, and inspirations that spring pristine from the primary spring of truth and life: Christ himself (*Exiles: Living Missionally in a Post-Christian Culture* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006], 26).

position of weakness. Jacob, for example, has to wrestle with a “stranger” at the ford of Jabbok, not knowing it was God. But there he receives his new name, Israel, and a new identity. Sometimes welcoming God in the stranger requires struggle. The stranger summons us to change, to rethink our own identities, to reorder our cherished priorities.

As Darrell Fasching insightfully writes,

When we wrestle with God we become strangers to ourselves and thus are able to identify with the experience of the stranger and welcome the stranger in our lives. . . . Through the story of Jacob’s encounter with the stranger we come to learn that wrestling with the one who is alien or different does not have to lead to the victory of the one over the other. It can lead instead to mutual respect. Not all matches are zero-sum games in which there can be only one winner. Jacob wins; he prevails, but the stranger is not defeated and blesses him before departing.<sup>71</sup>

Betrayed by his brothers and forced to leave his country, Joseph finds himself a stranger in Egypt. As if that was not enough, he ends up in prison for trying to live up to his conscience and for rejecting the lifestyle and culture of his new country. He would have been justified to complain to God about his fate, but chooses to remain faithful. His curse will soon prove to be a blessing. And that blessing will be not only for him, but also for his family and for all nations around Egypt. As a foreigner and stranger, he becomes the divine and human appointed savior for his host nation.

Years later, when the Israelites found themselves as strangers under a cruel and unmerciful political regime in Egypt, it was difficult for them to understand God’s purpose and hand in the oppression. But God was there, and wanted them to be a testimony to all nations, for soon Israel leaves Egypt unharmed, rich, and free. And all those who have seen God’s powerful hand at work joined them as they left Egypt.

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<sup>71</sup> Darrell J. Fasching, *Narrative Theology after Auschwitz: From Alienation to Ethics* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1992), 2.



Moses, their leader, had to be trained by God in the desert, in exile, so he could identify with Israel as a foreigner and pilgrim. In the desert mountains of Midian, he learned from the foreigner Jethro how to survive in the austere conditions of the desert and how to have patience. He learned about God, too, and about his beautiful and balanced character. Only then was he qualified to lead the people of Israel on their arduous journey. The exile was crucial for Moses' future mission.

Finally, when Israel entered Canaan, God told them that "the land is mine and you are but aliens and my tenants."<sup>72</sup> This was a direct reminder that the blessing was not in the land, but in the God of the land who had a mission for them. They were a chosen people and aliens at the same time, stewards of the land but living there by God's grace.

Every year the Israelites had festivals to remind them about their status. Every harvest they remembered the story of their oppression, of liberation, and of God's miraculous intervention. This was no mere sentiment, but was to be shown toward the Levite, the poor, the foreigner, the orphan, and the widow; and a special tithe had to be given "to the Levite, the alien, the fatherless and the widow, so that they may eat in your towns and be satisfied."<sup>73</sup>

The story of Ruth illustrates how this very command fulfills a missionary role. As a Moabite, a widow, and hungry, with no possession and no family, Ruth immigrates to Israel's territory at the time of harvest. A faithful Israelite lets her glean in the fields and

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<sup>72</sup> Lev 25:23.

<sup>73</sup> Deut 26:12. Wright notes that "equality before the law for all social groups, including aliens and immigrants, is made explicit in Exod 12:49, Lev 19:34 and Num 15:16" (Christopher J. H. Wright, *An Eye for an Eye: The Place of Old Testament Ethics Today* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1983], 166). God's justice and character was the same for all, regardless of social, economic, or religious status.

makes sure she has everything she needs, including protection. But God has a greater blessing in store for her. She becomes part of the genealogy of Jesus. God transforms defeat into victory and mourning into joy by the hand of an Israelite who has not forgotten that he is a stranger and a sojourner, too.<sup>74</sup>

Naaman and the young servant in his house illustrate how this principle of being a stranger can work both ways. As a leper, Naaman decides to go to the foreign territory of Israel for health reasons. God provides a “stranger,” an Israelite girl in his house who is willing to become a blessing in spite of being taken as a prisoner of war and working as a slave for her foreign conquerors. People have the chance to become a blessing at the crossing of borders, when they are either willing or forced to become foreigners. As a result of this double crossing of borders, by the Jewish slave and the Syrian army leader, Naaman feels the touch of God not only on his skin but also on his soul.

YHWH intervenes in the life and fortunes of pagan nations, too, and he is able to do it without Israel’s help. But he wants his people to go and bless other nations by sharing their experience with God so these nations will recognize it is YHWH who appoints kings and deposes them. Israel’s mission is to go and make God known by helping them understand God’s role and intervention in their history.

### Called to Witness in Exile

The very fact that Israel, a small and defeated nation, could speak about the power of their God was not only due to their monotheistic worldview but also to the fact that YHWH warned them about what would happen if they do not fulfill the expectations of

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<sup>74</sup> See also Herbert J. Kane, *Christian Missions in Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1976), 26-28.

the covenant. They were living proof that it was not other gods, but YHWH who sent them into exile. The exile was a punishment because the name of YHWH was profaned among the nations. Even the negative consequences of Israel's choices serve God's aims.

Unfortunately, when confronted with the exile, Israel could not understand that God was behind it. The psalmist described the situation in vivid terms: "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept when we remembered Zion. We hung our harps upon the willows in the midst of it. For there those who carried us away captive asked of us a song, and those who plundered us requested mirth, saying, 'Sing us one of the songs of Zion!' How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?"<sup>75</sup> Israel became so land-centered and focused that they could not understand they were not simply victims, but sent with a mission.<sup>76</sup> It took them decades to realize that God is a god of the nations, too, a God of the whole earth. "God was not only in the Temple or Sanctuary, but he was God of all earth and creation. They discovered they could sing God's praises in a strange land. He was there, as fully as in Jerusalem."<sup>77</sup>

It becomes clear that the exile is God's doing. God creates crises, allows them to happen. In Isaiah's words, "the Lord Yahweh Sabbaoth is about to deprive Jerusalem and

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<sup>75</sup> Ps 137:1-4.

<sup>76</sup> Michael Frost cites Walter Brueggemann in calling attention to the fact that "the danger in exile is to become so preoccupied with self that one cannot step outside oneself to rethink, reimagine, and redescribe larger reality. Such self-preoccupation very rarely produces energy, courage, or freedom" (*Exiles*, 9). Wright also notes that "the unthinkable had happened. God's people were evicted from God's land. . . . The God who acted for justice at the exodus remained committed to maintaining it among his own people" (Christopher J. H. Wright, *Knowing Jesus through the Old Testament* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992], 18). When their mission has been hindered by property, God had to remove the property in order to free them for mission, to give them another chance—a parallel to the second chance given humanity after the Flood.

<sup>77</sup> Webber, *Today's Church*, 12.

Judah of resources and provisions, all reserves of food, all reserves of water.”<sup>78</sup> The stories of Joseph, Ruth, Naaman, Daniel, and all others who go through crises suddenly make sense.<sup>79</sup> God allowed crises to take place and people to become strangers in a foreign land. Even if they could not understand God’s mercy and justice, and thought they were stricken by God, he had a plan.

Jeremiah was told by God to write letters to the exiles.

This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those *I carried into exile* from Jerusalem to Babylon: ‘Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which *I have carried you into exile*. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.’<sup>80</sup>

Israel, the chosen people, with a destiny and clear vocation had a difficult time listening to such messages. It took a long time until it sunk in that “I have sent you into

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<sup>78</sup> Isa 3:1.

<sup>79</sup> Wright claims that Old Testament people were instructed to preserve YHWH’s identity by telling the story of what he had done for them – “whether to themselves or (in some way that remained a mystery in Old Testament times) to the nations” (*The Mission of God*, 56). Here is the big problem with Wright’s position: how could some in the OT times know what to do and what God expects from them? How was it possible for the young girl in Naaman’s house to know what to say? What about Daniel and so many others? Why is telling God’s story to the nations in the Old Testament a mystery for Wright? The author also maintains that YHWH intervenes in the life and fortunes of pagan nations and that he is able to do it without Israel’s help (*ibid.*, 85). This seems to be his argument that God will do it anyway, so Israel can sit and relax, just be there in a centripetal way. But how do other nations recognize it is YHWH who appoints kings and deposes them if there is no one to go and tell them? It is Israel’s mission to go and make God known, at the same time helping them understand his role in their history.

<sup>80</sup> Jer 29:4-7, emphasis mine. Although God is described as the one being responsible for the exile, there is no connection between this assumed responsibility and the abuses and horrors brought on by the captors.

exile.”<sup>81</sup> The exile had become the only option for God’s people in those circumstances. In time, the exile became as important as the Exodus. Because the exile was God’s doing, he gave meaning and purpose to their life in a new country. There could be freedom in bondage. God had shown Israel how to live and what was expected of them. The Old Testament community lived and survived in spite of circumstances.

In exile, God’s people were also given a clear vocation: “to seek the welfare of the city.” They were not to give in to apathy, discouragement, or self-judgment. “Pray to the Lord on its behalf.” The loyalty to God was to be transcendent, beyond the claims of the immediate political situation. Integrity is the key word, regardless of the place one is in. In doing something for others around them Israel found the freedom that enriched their lives. They were called to think in new ways, to be flexible and open. This missionary mind-set is expressed by Webber: “We never grow old in our expectancy, in our openness to the future, in our freedom to follow the leading of God. In terms of our vocation we are a pilgrim people.”<sup>82</sup>

The same missionary mind-set based on integrity is reflected by Mordecai in exile. When the foreign king was in danger, Mordecai had no second thoughts in revealing the plot against the king and saving his life. Likewise, although a foreigner, Esther the exile was taken to King’s Xerxes’ palace and included in the royal harem in

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<sup>81</sup> Robert C. Linthicum shows that the Hebrew term used for “exiled” is sometimes translated as “sent.” “The Hebrew word actually contains both meanings. It would be translated most accurately with the awkward phrase, ‘I have caused you to be carried away captive.’ The word means ‘exile’—that is, ‘forced removal from one’s country.’ But it also suggests that what happened to the Israelites was not simply circumstance; they were ‘sent’ into exile by God” (*City of God, City of Satan*, 147). Goldingay offers the reason for the exile: “Because of their self-indulgence and failure to pay attention to what Yhwh is doing” (*Israel’s Faith*, 302).

<sup>82</sup> Webber, *Today’s Church*, 16.

the capital of Assyria. This might be considered shameful for an Israelite and also for modern readers. But when the crisis struck, Esther's "foreignness" played an important role in the story. Mordecai's words reveal a deeper understanding: "And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"<sup>83</sup> As a result, the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus heard the decree about the true and only God who protected his people and who wanted to become their God, too.

Even Daniel recognizes that "the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his [Nebuchadnezzar's] hand, with some of the articles of the house of God."<sup>84</sup> Israel needed shock therapy in order to become the missionaries God intended. YHWH was behind the apparent tragedy, helping them to rediscover their missionary heritage. Sometimes, this had to be done by a forced centrifugal movement. In spite of a lack of a missionary commission in the Old Testament, God's centrifugal plan becomes clear through such historical events. The later decrees issued by different kings under which Daniel served made God known in all provinces and languages of those vast empires, showing God's plan with the exiled Jews.

By God's grace Israel survived, and the reminder of their pilgrim and sojourner's status helped them not to forget that they were dependent on him. When Israel worshipped idols and engaged in social oppression, when it forgot that life and prosperity were received as gifts, God let them feel what exile really meant. They ended up orphans, widows, with no support, no freedom, no food, and no hope.<sup>85</sup> YHWH became a

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<sup>83</sup> Esther 4:14.

<sup>84</sup> Dan 1:2.

<sup>85</sup> Lam 4-5.

foreigner and a sojourner to them, “like a stranger in the land, like a traveler turning aside for the night.”<sup>86</sup>

God often comes to humans in the guise of a stranger.<sup>87</sup> As a result, in the New Testament, Jesus was born as a stranger, exiled in a manger, far from his heavenly home. He was welcomed by three wise men from the East, strangers, and by the shepherds, the outcasts of society. He had to immigrate shortly after his birth, so he learned what it meant to be a stranger.<sup>88</sup> Although born as a Jew, he was rejected by his own people, so all foreigners and the sojourners from any nation could identify with him regardless of ethnicity. He was also a pilgrim, on the dusty roads of Palestine, “as one who sought to meet the needs of others, always available to do the will of his father in heaven.”<sup>89</sup>

Jesus called his disciples to become strangers and pilgrims, to abandon their nets, a traditional occupation, in order to become fishers of men, an unknown job. He took them centrifugally throughout Palestine, and also to the land of Syria to confront them with a different culture. He appeared to them on the road to Emmaus, and the only question they asked him was “Are you the only *stranger* in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?”<sup>90</sup> They hoped he would liberate them from the Romans, but he never even alluded to it. He had a different plan. He

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<sup>86</sup> Jer 14:8.

<sup>87</sup> “He was in the world, and the world came into being through Him; yet the world did not know Him” (John 1:10).

<sup>88</sup> “I was a stranger and you welcomed me” (Matt 25:35).

<sup>89</sup> Webber, *Today’s Church*, 16.

<sup>90</sup> Luke 24:18 (emphasis mine). Apparently, he chose to reveal himself first to the disciples who went out of Jerusalem, not to those who remained in the city. Even Mary is sent from the tomb on a mission to the other disciples, and not allowed to stay there.

needed the Roman infrastructure of roads and communication that would help carry the gospel to the ends of the earth, to all nations, tribes, languages, and peoples. He always had in mind a centrifugal approach.

Jesus was also the model for welcoming strangers. He associated with the outcasts of society: “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?”<sup>91</sup> When approached by the centurion, whose servant he would heal, Jesus exclaimed: “Many will come from East and West [foreigners] and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.”<sup>92</sup> When asked to indicate who is a neighbor, Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan, a stranger caring for another stranger, because he understood.<sup>93</sup>

Another reality frequently overlooked is that the New Testament contains many passages that talk of centripetal mission, without naming it as such. It seems that in the text, centrifugal mission is not separated from the centripetal. Presenting mission in the New Testament as overwhelmingly centrifugal clearly misses the balance of the text and creates a distorted lens for the interpretation of mission in the Old Testament. The encouragement to hospitality, even toward the stranger and the foreigner, and a pure life that attracts unbelievers are equally present in both Testaments.

During the New Testament time, the Romans stationed in Palestine were conquerors. They did not come to Jerusalem attracted by the beauty of Israel’s religion.

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<sup>91</sup> Matt 9:11. Michael Frost concludes that “if exiles are looking for where God is already working, they might be surprised by what they find. . . . No one in Jesus’ time would have thought to find God eating with tax collectors or playing with children. God shattered the preconceptions of religious people then, and does so today” (*Exiles*, 142).

<sup>92</sup> Matt 8:11.

<sup>93</sup> Frost believes that the “biblical metaphor that best suits our current times and faith situation is that of *exile*. Just like the Jewish exiles, the church today is grieving its loss and is struggling with humiliation. The ground has slipped out from under the church” (*Exiles*, 9).



They heard Jesus' teachings and witnessed his miracles. No wonder that a Centurion, Cornelius, was the first to knock at the church's door. Peter was confronted with the gentile stranger in the form of unclean food. He was advised to make no difference and welcome Cornelius. "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it."<sup>94</sup>

At the same time there was another movement towards the margins of the empire. Saul left Jerusalem wanting to cleanse the earth of the Christian "disease." He left with a plan, but reached Damascus with a totally different attitude and there he received the real plan for the rest of his life. He became the best missionary to the gentiles, while God's instruments in Diaspora were the Jewish immigrants who had to flee Palestine because of persecution or economic crisis. God can use "foreignness" as a two-way street in the centrifugal-centripetal model.

#### The Nations as God's Servants

God can use other nations as his instruments, too. The foreign nations that took Israel into exile were simply servants of God. The victory against Israel was God's victory not theirs.<sup>95</sup> By a paradoxical twist, God became Israel's enemy in this case. YHWH demonstrates he is the ruler of all the earth, of all nations, and has no favorites. The covenant with Abraham and Israel was not a sign of favoritism.<sup>96</sup> "If God could use

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<sup>94</sup> Heb 13:2.

<sup>95</sup> "The nations who were the witnesses of the covenant between YHWH and Israel are also the instruments in God's hand for the execution of curses and blessings. Israel is judged by the world" (Wright, *The Mission of God*, 470).

<sup>96</sup> Amos 3:2; 9:7; Deut 10:17.

Israel as the agent of his judgment on wicked nations, he could readily apply the same principle in reverse to Israel itself.”<sup>97</sup>

Justice and mercy go hand in hand in portraying a missionary God. In his mercy, God’s people, even under judgment, remained God’s people for God’s mission. The nations were God’s appointed instrument to preserve Israel, both ethnically and spiritually. Israel was to prosper in exile and increase in number. The nations provided excellent conditions for God’s plan. Israel was to seek the welfare of the city and pray for God’s blessing on it. The nations even invited Israel to sing and worship in their midst.<sup>98</sup> The Israelites were supposed to be not only the recipients of Abraham’s promise, but the agents to share that blessing with their captor nations. God used the nations to bless Israel and make sure they too learned to bless others. Later the same approach is found in Jesus’ words to pray “for your enemies.”<sup>99</sup>

#### Called to Monotheism

In Ps 96 there is a call to spread the knowledge of the true God among the nations. It is not just an invitation to make room for God in addition to other gods. The Old Testament describes the relationship between God and the idols as conflictual, as warfare.

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<sup>97</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God*, 459. “There is no favoritism in God’s dealings with Israel and the nations. All stand under YHWH’s judgment. All can turn to YHWH and find mercy” (ibid., 462). Goldingay indicates that “the nations are drawn into the same acknowledgment of Yhwh as Israel itself offers. Even Yhwh’s winning a victory over some other peoples is a paradoxical form of good news for the nations of the world. It evidences that the moment will come when Yhwh takes up the reins of government over the world as a whole instead of continuing to leave it to the insubordinate underlings, heavenly or earthly” (*Israel’s Faith*, 735-736).

<sup>98</sup> Ps 137:3.

<sup>99</sup> Matt 5:44, 45; Luke 6:27-30.

There is a radical difference between the Creator God and all idols.<sup>100</sup> The true God is interested in blessing and justice while idols simply masquerade as protectors who disappoint their worshippers.<sup>101</sup> God loves, idols are inert. When God's people are motivated by the same love, they go among the nations to share God's blessing and righteousness. Centrifugal mission is motivated by love. The call to fight idolatry means to go into idol territory, not just wait at home. This is clearly illustrated by Daniel in Babylon, Esther at Susa, or by Paul who deals with idolatry in Lystra, Athens, and Ephesus, all locations outside Israel's borders.

Jeremiah is told to act out a prophecy against idolatry in Jer 13. The belt kept in hiding ends up in decay. But God wants to "wear" his people so the nations can see Israel and bring glory to God. This implies that this "piece of clothing" has to be worn outside the house, so the nations can see it. What honor does a "pure," clean, beautiful, even restored cloth bring to its owner if it is not taken out for people to see? In Wright's words: "The scorching severity of the warnings against idolatry, then, are not just for the benefit of God's own people but ultimately, through them, for the benefit of the nations.

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<sup>100</sup> "What lies behind the Bible's ongoing polemic against other gods, then, is not the issue of whether these other gods exist. It is the issue of who is the Creator, and thus the issue of who is the appropriate object of worship. If we are to recapture the biblical warfare perspective of the cosmos, it is imperative that we give full credit to the Bible's robust affirmation of a divine society that exists between humans and the supreme God" (Gregory A. Boyd, *God at War: The Bible and Spiritual Conflict* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997], 129. Boyd is willing to accept the reality and existence of different entities and powers under the umbrella of the term "gods."

<sup>101</sup> "It is not the acknowledgment of the existence of other gods that is the problem from a scriptural perspective. This much is assumed. Problems with other gods arise only when people begin to forget that these gods were themselves made, and hence that these gods are not to be worshiped" (ibid., 127).

That is their missional relevance.”<sup>102</sup> The warnings were only good if they went out to Israel or the nations. Centrifugal mission is always motivated by concern expressed through mercy and judgment.

When Israel worshiped idols, God used the nations to remind them of the creator God and their mission. However, Israel could not understand how God could bless others and not them. They became jealous and kept praying that YHWH would remember his covenant with them, as if God was the unfaithful party. God expected the chosen nation to fulfill its missionary role while Israel expected God to bring the nations as servants to them.

### **A Biblical Framework: The Cosmic Conflict**

All the previous assumptions are interwoven in the biblical structure. They all present a necessary balance reflecting God’s nature. God’s character does not change according to the Testament. Based on textual indications, mission is part of God’s unchanging nature and was handed down to humans at creation. A careful reading of the first chapters in Genesis shows that the environment in which humans began their existence on planet earth was not ideal. The Bible begins with the image of a cosmic conflict even if the reader is not immediately aware of it.<sup>103</sup> Circumstances already

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<sup>102</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God*, 187. The nations are God’s final goal, Israel being part of the nations. However, if the warnings against idolatry serve only to scare the nations, it is improbable that such mission can accurately reflect God’s character.

<sup>103</sup> Walter Wink considers that “a good God creates a good creation. Chaos does not resist order. Good is ontologically prior to evil. Neither evil nor violence is a part of the creation, but both enter as a result of the first couple’s sin and the machinations of the serpent. A basically good reality is thus corrupted by free decisions reached by creatures. In this far more complex and subtle explanation of the origins of things, evil for the first time emerges as a problem requiring solution (*Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* [Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1992], 14).

existent at the time of creation call for a reevaluation of the creation account and humans' responsibilities. The presence of sin in the universe forces us to place mission in a new hermeneutical framework.

The territory of the earth was disputed and God's authority was already challenged.<sup>104</sup> Although such an understanding comes from other biblical passages, there are hints even in Gen 1 and 2. "The earth was created in a 'frontier' state."<sup>105</sup> God's mission was to reestablish his dominion in this part of the universe. When God expressed his desire to create beings in his image, he already ascribed a mission to them: Humans were to have dominion and authority over the rest of creation.<sup>106</sup> They were supposed to take care of the garden and preserve their assigned dominion.<sup>107</sup>

God instructed Adam and Eve to stay away from the tree of knowledge under the consequence of death. Satan's subtle questions and accusations in Gen 3 reveal that

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<sup>104</sup> Gregory Boyd notes that Satan is not so much present in the Old Testament, but "the warfare worldview in the Old Testament is expressed in terms of God's conflict with hostile waters, with cosmic monsters, and with other gods" (*Satan and the Problem of Evil: Constructing a Trinitarian Warfare Theodicy* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001], 30). "While Scripture emphasizes God's ultimate authority over the world, it also emphasizes that agents, whom God has created, can and do resist his will. Scripture does not teach that God controls all the behavior of free agents, whether humans or angels. Humans and fallen angels are able to grieve God's Spirit and to some extent frustrate his purposes" (ibid., 15). Charles H. Kraft identifies the same cosmic conflict framework ("two-kingdoms-in-conflict") as necessary for a correct understanding of the Bible (*I Give You Authority* [Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books, 1997], 32-33).

<sup>105</sup> Okoye, *Israel and the Nations*, 33.

<sup>106</sup> Gen 1:26, 28. Wright has a vigorous discussion about authority as command or nature of reality. "The created order itself, by its objective reality, provides an authority structure within which we have freedom to act. Authority is not just a list of positive commands; authority includes legitimating permission. Authority authorizes; it grants freedom to act within boundaries" (*The Mission of God*, 53; see the whole discussion on pp. 52-59).

<sup>107</sup> Gen 2:15. Gerhard Von Rad comments that God "established man as his own governor on earth. Man is to represent in his rule God's claim to lordship on earth" (*God at Work in Israel* [Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1974], 103).

God's word and character is under attack.<sup>108</sup> Part of God's mission was to restore his honor and character, and to save humanity from sin. In this context, the best framework seems to be one of cosmic conflict that requires mission as a vital ingredient. In the classical "blessing" approach only one aspect of this mission is taken into consideration. The rest of this chapter will look closer at the issues involved in the cosmic conflict and their bearing on mission.

### Genesis 1-3

In Gen 1-3, there is a portrayal of the divine mission that is fleshed out in the rest of Scripture. The first three chapters of Genesis contain the core of mission. Taking Abraham's call as the starting point for mission is to miss an important part of the whole picture. Although commentators focus on Israel's relation to the nations as key to understanding mission in the Old Testament, there are elements that indicate mission (and a need for it) existed long before Abraham.<sup>109</sup>

### Creation

In the last decades, renewed attention has been given to the "final form" of the biblical text, and Gen 1-3 has been increasingly recognized as set apart from the rest of the Bible, constituting a kind of prologue or introduction. These opening chapters of

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<sup>108</sup> Referring to "principalities and powers," C. Norman Kraus questions if these are "inherently evil, or are they created orders gone wrong? Are they detached spiritual personalities that affect the fallen human mind? Are they projections of the human subconscious?" (*An Intrusive Gospel? Christian Mission in the Postmodern World* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998], 96).

<sup>109</sup> In Roger E. Hedlund's words, "we begin with Gen 1-11 because the Bible begins here" (*The Mission of the Church in the World: A Biblical Theology* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1983], 27).

Scripture are now widely regarded as providing the framework for the rest of the Bible.<sup>110</sup>

In creation, God's original mission of love is found, the Father sending forth his Spirit,<sup>111</sup> and his Son, the Word,<sup>112</sup> on a mission to create the universe, and in particular, this world.<sup>113</sup> God had a mission for this earth: "He formed it to be inhabited."<sup>114</sup> It is imperative for human beings, as God's creatures, to understand their origin in the divine mission of the triune God; otherwise it will be difficult to claim any part in this divine mission. The first chapters of the Bible reveal that *missio Dei* is a Trinitarian mission.

Every creation day witnessed an evaluation of that part of the creation process being declared good. This evaluative process seems strange for an all-powerful God, except if it is recognized that all heavenly beings were watching the creation dynamic. The statement that each phase of creation was good implies an accusation of wrong or weakness. Genesis 3 proves that such accusations already existed. God also showed his

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<sup>110</sup>See, e.g., Deborah F. Sawyer, *God, Gender and the Bible* (London: Routledge, 2002), 24, 29. Phyllis A. Bird, writes: "Canonically, the understanding of human nature expressed or implied in the laws, wisdom literature, narratives, prophetic texts, and other genres of the Hebrew Scriptures may be viewed as commentary on the creation texts. . . . The Bible's first statement concerning humankind remains the normative statement that governs all others" ("Bone of My Bone and Flesh of My Flesh," *Theology Today* 50 [1994]: 525, 527). John Rankin summarizes the growing conviction among biblical scholars: "Whether one is evangelical or liberal, it is clear that Genesis 1-3 is the interpretive foundation of all Scripture" ("Power and Gender at the Divinity School," in *Finding God at Harvard: Spiritual Journeys of Thinking Christians*, ed. Kelly Monroe [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996], 203).

<sup>111</sup> Gen 1:2; cf. Ps 104:30.

<sup>112</sup> Gen 1:3; John 1:1.

<sup>113</sup> "The heavens and the earth" (Gen 1:1). Psalm 104, a psalm clearly echoing creation and going through the various days of creation in the same order as Gen 1, speaks of the Spirit being *sent* by God in creation: "when you send forth Your Spirit, they are created" (v. 30).

<sup>114</sup> Isa 45:18.

justice by allowing Satan to tempt humans and allowing his creatures to decide against their Creator.

Genesis 3 describes the rise of a moral conflict on earth. The issue is the character of God. The serpent casts doubt on the goodness of the Creator, with his insinuating questions to Eve: “Did God really say . . . ?”<sup>115</sup> In other words, he is not the all-powerful and all-loving God he claims he is. In fact, the text of Gen 3 (as well as Gen 1 and 2) implies that this conflict had already arisen in the cosmos before the moral fall of Adam and Eve.<sup>116</sup> Even before the sin of the first human couple, the serpent in the Garden is clearly presented as a medium used by an evil power, referred to later in Scripture as “the accuser,” Satan himself, which the book of Revelation calls “that ancient serpent, called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world.”<sup>117</sup>

The book of Revelation, which closes the Scriptures, gives additional insight about what happened before the earth was created. Revelation 12:7-8 refers to the cosmic “war” that “broke out in heaven, Michael and his angels fought against the dragon and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them

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<sup>115</sup> Gen 3:1. Any imbalanced view of God’s character ends up in a disaster for humans. Unfortunately, the “blessing” mission approach suffers from the same imbalance, missing the righteous side of God. Theologies that neglect or avoid the just side of God’s character mislead those who use them. A contemporary result of such theologies is the emphasis on God’s grace in detriment of his justice. Such a portrayal of God’s character is based on humanistic assumptions, not on the whole of the biblical text.

<sup>116</sup> John Goldingay remarks that “the First Testament does not have a concept of evil as a self-existent entity. Its first explicit references to evil (*ra*) are illuminating. The sequence of the First Testament narrative suggests that one can understand evil only when set against good (*tob*, Gen 2:9, 17; 3:5, 22). Good preexists evil; there is good in Genesis 1, but no evil. Evil has no existence or definition in itself. Second, evil expresses itself as doing wrong to other people, as hurt or violence” (*Israel’s Faith*, 254).

<sup>117</sup> Rev 12:9.



in heaven any longer.” The book of Job,<sup>118</sup> Isa 14, and Ezek 28 provide further details of the rise of this cosmic conflict, about the identity of the one who contested earth’s dominion, and what his plan was.<sup>119</sup> The issue in the cosmic conflict was God’s character. Satan accused God of being a tyrant and a despot. As a response, God created free-willed beings in order to prove that his character is both love and justice.

The two creation accounts in Gen 1-2 describe in detail God’s original design, or mission, for his creation: for Adam and Eve, he prepares their garden home, prescribes their work, their diet, their social relationship with each other and with the animals, their day of rest, etc. In the Garden, God gave Adam and Eve their life-mission. It is actually a

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<sup>118</sup> The book of Job, written about the same time as the book of Genesis, gives the same picture of the cosmic conflict centered in the character of God. At the beginning of the book we have the same portrait as in Genesis of the *moral conflict*. In Job the *cosmic* dimension of the conflict is visible, involving the whole universe and the inhabitants of the unfallen worlds. As in Genesis, the conflict revolves around the *character of God*. Satan insinuates that God is not trustworthy, that he is arbitrary and unfair. He charges that Job does not serve God because his character is worthy of worship, but because God has bribed Job with temporal blessings. The rest of the book is divine permission for Satan to try to demonstrate the legitimacy of his claims. Many scholars recognize in Job an overarching theme of *theodicy*—vindication of God’s actions and character in face of the false charges of Satan. Walter Brueggemann says that “it is widely agreed that the book of Job is Israel’s most ambitious countertestimony concerning the crisis of theodicy” (*Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* [Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2005], 386). See also Boyd, *God at War*, 52.

<sup>119</sup> A closer look at two crucial terms in Ezek 28 reveals a clear connection between the rise of the Cosmic Conflict and the issue of the character of God. Vs. 15 speaks of the anointed, covering cherub: “You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created till iniquity was found in you.” The word for “iniquity” (*awalah*) may also be translated as “injustice.” A sense of God’s injustice was found in the heart of Lucifer, and the next verse clarifies: “By the abundance of your trading, You became filled with violence within.” The word usually translated “trading” is *rekullah*, which comes from the verb (*rakal*) that means, “to go about, from one person to another, trading either goods, or words of slander” (see Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, *The New Brown, Driver, Briggs, Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon* [Lafayette, IN: Associated Publishers and Authors, 1980], s.v. “rkl”). The best translation here is not trading goods, which does not fit a heavenly context, but trading words of slander. Satan goes about from one angel to another, spreading his deceitful words of slander concerning the character of God. He is cast to this earth, and continues his castigations of the character of God, beginning with Eve until today.

three-fold mission, indicated and highlighted by the word “blessing.”<sup>120</sup> The basic mission for humanity, accompanied by a special divine blessing, encompassed three aspects: offspring, land and dominion, and finally, worship. Each of these aspects reflects God’s character.

## **Offspring**

The first aspect had to do with offspring: “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.”<sup>121</sup> This commissioning is expanded in Gen 2 to include the whole marital relationship between the husband and wife, as well as the blessing of procreation.<sup>122</sup> The divinely given mission involved expanding in a centrifugal direction (“fill the earth”), but also nurturing the family relationships at home, centripetally.

From the beginning, the two missionary directions were intertwined. God was equally interested in the internal relationship network and the expansion of his kingdom. Neglecting either one leads to tragedy. The balance of the mission mandate is crucial for the health of the family, too. God addressed Adam and Eve directly for the first time, and charged them with the responsibility of creating. The first human couple had to learn that creation is done best in relationship, reflecting the very nature of the godhead in its creative endeavors.

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<sup>120</sup> In Hebrew the word “bless” when used of God implies his empowerment to fulfill the mission assigned by the One who blesses. It is the equivalent of commissioning. Walther Zimmerli notes that “the blessing . . . is in the imperative. What is a privilege is at the same time a command; it is God’s will sending man into the world and making him part of it. Man is not called to withdraw diffidently from the world; he is sent into it with a commission” (*The Old Testament and the World* [London: SPCK, 1976], 42).

<sup>121</sup> Gen 1:28.

<sup>122</sup> Gen 2:24.

## **“Tend and Keep”**

The second aspect of the God-given mission in Gen 1:26-28 had to do with land and dominion. In Gen 2:15 this is extended to the tending and care for the garden. The dominion over the earth implies kingship: Adam and Eve were crowned coregents in Eden.<sup>123</sup> But this kingship and dominion was two-fold. First, it was a royal priesthood because the Hebrew terms for “tend and keep” were technical terms that, when used together elsewhere in the Pentateuch, describe the work of the priests in the sanctuary. It was the highest mission to be faithful stewards taking care of God’s creation, mediating God’s love and goodness to all around them. This also implies an ecological responsibility as part of the original mandate of the pre-Fall mission.<sup>124</sup>

The same aspect of the human mission is recognized in Gen 1:28 and is conveyed when Adam and Eve are commanded to be fruitful and multiply. Adam is given the task to keep this world, which was created from chaos and nothingness, from slipping back

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<sup>123</sup> “God rules, but his desire is to rule through his earthly coregents. For this reason, . . . the redemption of the earth is intrinsically connected with the redemption of humanity. Indeed, the whole creation, according to Paul, “waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God” (Rom 8:19). For this reason also the redemption of the cosmos is intrinsically connected to defeating the evil force that now holds humanity, and thus the whole earth, in bondage” (Boyd, *God at War*, 110). The widespread opinion that the Kingdom of God begins only with the New Testament is invalidated by the roles assigned by God to the first humans in Eden. The concept of the Kingdom of God starting before the Fall of Adam and Eve supports the continuity between the Testaments, the Unity of Scripture, and the consistency of God’s character. John Fuellenbach states that “the Old Testament describes Yahweh as King first and foremost when seen as the Creator, the King of the Universe, the Victor over the monster of chaos, the Sustainer of the universe. God’s kingship is implicitly affirmed in the creation story. . . . It is creation theology that is fundamental to the idea of the Kingdom in Israel’s religion” (*The Kingdom of God: The Message of Jesus Today* [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2003], 27).

<sup>124</sup> These first two aspects of the divinely given mission have frequently been called the “cultural mandate,” which “marks the beginning of a stream of obligation—a mandate for family and community, law and order, culture and civilization, and ecological concern that widens and deepens as it courses through Scripture” (Glasser et al., *Announcing the Kingdom*, 38).

into chaos again.<sup>125</sup> He is told to “subdue” (*kabas*) the earth. In the Hebrew Bible, the word “subdue” is used almost exclusively to refer to a violent military conquest.<sup>126</sup> Such a military meaning implies a war or a conflict. Adam must literally “dominate,” “subjugate,” or conquer the rest of the creation, going out of Eden in a centrifugal direction and taking all creation under his dominion.<sup>127</sup>

This sense is repeated and amplified in Gen 2:18 where God says he will make Adam an “*ezer kenegdo*.” The traditional translation as “helper” is too weak.<sup>128</sup> The word connotes an active sustainer or ally in military contexts. Adam is clearly charged by God with “subduing” (together with Eve, his *ezer kenegdo*) the rest of the creation. God gave Adam the mission to take charge or “own” the creation. The softening of the language of subduing by reframing or limiting it to “stewardship” cripples the real meaning of the text. The language of military conflict actually serves a vital theological function in this otherwise romantic passage.

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<sup>125</sup> This may be the meaning of what Karl Barth referred to as the “shadow side” (*Schattenseite*) of the creation, the *nihil* or nothingness (*Church Dogmatics*, vol. III/3, 296).

<sup>126</sup> Num 32:22, 29; Josh 18:1; Judg 8:28; 2 Sam 22:40. Gregory Boyd states that “this term usually suggests the suppression, the conquering or the enslavement of hostile forces.” He asks that, “If what we have in Genesis 1 is a pure and pristine creation of all things ex nihilo, . . . if all is exactly as God intended, what is there to conquer?” (*God at War*, 106).

<sup>127</sup> “According to the restoration view, however, neither the commands to subdue the earth and protect the garden nor the sudden appearance of Satan is puzzling. In this view the earth (this present earth) is birthed, as it were, in an infected incubator. It is fashioned in a warfare context. It is itself altogether good, but it is made and preserved over and against forces that are perpetually hostile to it, just as the other creation-conflict passages of Scripture suggest. In this view, moreover, humans are made in the image of God and placed on the earth precisely so that they might gradually vanquish this chaos and establish—or better, reestablish—God’s all-good plan for it” (*ibid.*, 107).

<sup>128</sup> Robert Alter suggests that *ezer kenegdo* should be translated as “sustainer beside him” or “lifesaver” (Robert Alter, *Genesis* [New York: W. W. Norton, 1996], 31-32).

The same meaning is indicated by the term “keep” in Gen 2:15, namely the necessity to defend and preserve the garden. Although Genesis does not explicitly introduce the cosmic conflict, there are indications that such was the state of the universe at the time of Creation.<sup>129</sup> Glasser points to the Hebrew word for “keep” (*samar*) as being a military term, and continues with the following comments:

The Bible provides no philosophical or speculative account of the ultimate origin of evil. It is also silent concerning the Creation of beings within the spirit world. We are pressed to assume that there must have been a rebellion within that segment of God’s created order prior to the fall of the human race. This leads us to conclude that when Satan sought to deceive Eve, the larger universe must have been filled with darkness and riddled with a spirit of rebellion against God. Even so, evil was not created by God or allowed to exist outside of his control.<sup>130</sup>

Goldingay suggests that “the garden’s need of looking after or guarding suggests that strange forces will imperil it, and when the snake shows up, we will see the truth of this.”<sup>131</sup> Trying to identify the identity behind the tempting serpent, William Dyrness notes that “the questioning comes from creation itself, from a figure that has set itself against the good purposes of God. . . . Besides the many ministering angels, various gods or spirits with real power are acknowledged to be part of the created order. These forces

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<sup>129</sup> “We are . . . corulers with God over the earth and cowarriors with God against the forces of chaos for the earth. God’s plan for human beings and the earth shall be accomplished when all anticeation forces are vanquished and his kingdom is set up on the earth with him and his human subjects enthroned (Rev 5:10)” (Boyd, *God at War*, 107).

<sup>130</sup> Glasser et al., *Announcing the Kingdom*, 38, 40. Although Glasser indicates the cross as the event where the cosmic conflict started, he provides us with a fair hermeneutical view of the reality of evil already present in Genesis. Later, he concludes that in Rom 16:20 the cosmic conflict is yet to be accomplished.

<sup>131</sup> John Goldingay, *Israel’s Gospel*, Old Testament Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 118-119.

appear on a continuum from persons who are used by the evil forces to stand against God to actual appearances of Satan himself (presumably) in human form.”<sup>132</sup>

G. K. Beale links the priestly role with the commissioning to defend the garden, reflecting on the same commandment given to Israel to guard the Sanctuary from unclean or impure intruders.<sup>133</sup> He concludes that “this appears relevant for Adam, especially in the view of the unclean creature lurking on the perimeter of the Garden and who then enters.”<sup>134</sup>

David Burnett shares the same perspective on Gen 2:15 affirming that the first humans were supposed to “occupy” the territory assigned by God and defend the garden from harm.<sup>135</sup> The same “occupation” of the territory was commanded later to Israel

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<sup>132</sup> William A. Dyrness, *Let the Earth Rejoice! A Biblical Theology of Holistic Mission* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1983), 39. These forces are identified with “the gods of the neighboring nations or sometimes with the powers of chaos within creation itself. In every case however, they are something over which God is seen to triumph by his mighty power. . . . One should not conclude, however, that the forces opposing God may simply be ignored. Indeed there is a growing importance given to them in Scripture until we come to the close of revelation where the struggle of Eden reaches its horrible conclusion in the final battle between the beast and the forces of righteousness (Rev 19)” (ibid., 39, 40). Goldingay concludes that “there will be pressures on the garden even before humanity spoils things” (*Israel’s Faith*, 119).

<sup>133</sup> Num 3:6-7, 32, 38; 18:1-7.

<sup>134</sup> G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 48. He parallels Adam’s role to “guard” (*samar*) the garden to that of the priests later when they are called “guards” and “gatekeepers” (1 Chr 9:23, 17-27; Neh 11:19; 2 Chr 23:19) (ibid., 69).

<sup>135</sup> Burnett considers that “the word ‘subdue’ which is used in the RSV conveys the idea of a fight to conquer nature, but the actual meaning is to take the authority over the earth which is already possessed. . . . God placed human beings in the world to look after it and preserve it from harm” (*The Healing of the Nations*, 28). Boyd concurs: “The command is a bit puzzling unless the author was assuming that there were at the time forces which the garden needed protection against. When the tempting serpent appears in the next chapter, we perhaps get a clearer idea of what it was that Adam was supposed to beware of. But the sudden and unexplained presence of Satan (according to the traditional interpretation) in the garden is likewise difficult to account for on the supposition that Genesis 1 is providing anything like an exhaustive account of the original creation” (*God at War*, 106-107).

when they entered Canaan.<sup>136</sup> Their failure to completely fulfill this commandment led to tragic consequences. Adam lost ownership of the earth and had to work hard to make it produce, while Israel always felt the sting of the Canaanites' presence and false worship in the land.

## **Worship**

The third aspect of Adam and Eve's divinely ordained mission constitutes the engine by which the other two aspects of mission are powered: a spiritual mandate, entering into personal relationship with God. This was a sign of loyalty to the Creator, the true and only God. This is implied in Gen 2:3, "God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it (or made it holy)." To sanctify is to set apart for a special use by his presence. This implies that already in Eden, on the first Sabbath, God was inviting humans into intimate fellowship with their Creator.

He sanctified the seventh day, filling it with his loving presence; and he blessed the day, filling it with his power. From the beginning, the Sabbath was a focal point of mission.<sup>137</sup> Not only did God come to empower Adam and Eve on the Sabbath, but every day God came walking "in the cool of the day," to visit Adam and Eve.<sup>138</sup> They were to have daily intimate fellowship with their Creator. By worshipping God, Adam and Eve received instructions and power, and were prepared for their mission.

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<sup>136</sup> Deut 9:1; 11:31; 12:1-3, 29-30; Josh 1:11.

<sup>137</sup> The creation narrative plays an important role as a polemic against false religions: "To ancient peoples and to many animistic societies today, all sorts of spirits, powers, and divinities inhabit nature. But the biblical witness utterly refutes this. Nature is not to be worshiped; it is completely devoid of divinities" (Glasser et al., *Announcing the Kingdom*, 32).

<sup>138</sup> Gen 3:8.

## The Names of God

A closer look at the opening chapters of the Bible reveals an even deeper underlying issue than creation: the character of the Creator in his mission. There is a whole debate about the two accounts of creation in Gen 1-2 and the use of two names for God. In portraying creation week in Gen 1,<sup>139</sup> the Creator is named Elohim.<sup>140</sup> He is the omnipotent God; he speaks and it is done. He is the transcendent One, totally separate from and above his creation. He is the infinite One, the all-powerful sovereign Creator. He is Elohim.

In Gen 2 the name YHWH is introduced alongside Elohim. YHWH is the personal, covenant name of God. He is the One who comes down to be with his creatures, who bends down over a lump of clay, and blows into Adam's nostrils the breath of life; who takes one of Adam's ribs and architecturally designs and builds a beautiful creature to be his companion in mission. He is the intimate, caring God.

The use of two names for God results in a dual portrayal of the character of God. Critical scholars have claimed that this gives evidence of two different sources,<sup>141</sup> but in so doing they have missed the profound central issue portrayed in these two chapters. In Gen 1 and 2 Moses is not only portraying the divine act of creation and God's original design for humankind. He is also eloquently revealing the character of the missionary Creator.

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<sup>139</sup> The text actually continues through Gen 2:4a.

<sup>140</sup> This is the generic name for God; *El* means "mighty one," and the plural probably serves as a superlative, meaning "The Mightiest One."

<sup>141</sup> Okoye, *Israel and the Nations*, 24.



A crucial part of the divine mission from the beginning was to reveal who God really is, and what he is like, to make clear the nature of his character. Only the true God of the Judeo-Christian tradition is both infinite (Elohim) and personal (YHWH). This reflects the centrifugal-centripetal model. We are presented with a transcendent and immanent God at the same time. The gods of the eastern religions are infinite, but not personal; the gods of the Greeks in the West are personal, but not infinite. Only the God of Scripture is both. He is all-powerful; he can do anything; he is all-caring; he is right in a loving way.

In Glasser's words, "the Creation account is of such universal significance that one is pressed to conclude that it is the inalienable right of all people to know the God whose image they bear. Surely, God desires that those who know him should share with those who do not know him the reality of God's existence and nature."<sup>142</sup>

### **The Post-Edenic Curses**

The importance of emphasizing the character of the Creator as the central issue of God's mission right at the beginning of Scripture becomes clear only when we move on to the next facet of the divine mission set forth in Gen 1-3. The battle between the forces of good and evil left an indelible mark on the history of this planet. Paul even speaks of a plan made ages before the earth came into existence, a plan which detailed God's mission and the decision to send Jesus to create and rescue humanity, and restore peace in the universe.<sup>143</sup> This cosmic conflict was already in full swing by the time Adam and Eve

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<sup>142</sup> Glasser et al., *Announcing the Kingdom*, 36.

<sup>143</sup> Paul refers to this plan as the "mystery kept secret for long ages past" or being chosen in Christ "before the creation of the world." Rom 16:25, 26; Eph 1:3, 4; cf. 2 Tim 1:9; Heb 13:20.

walked in the garden. The same cosmic conflict required humans to protect the garden as a sign of God's dominion over creation and share in his mission. The free choice given to humans was a natural ingredient of the battle.

When God confronted his creatures in Gen 3, he showed them through a symbolic, ritual foreshadowing the need for a substitutionary sacrifice in order to restore peace in the universe and dominion and order on earth. The glory that surrounded humans as a reflection of God's glory disappeared so they shamed God in their new state instead of bringing him glory. He also had to sacrifice an animal in order to provide them with clothing and at the same time teach them the cruel reality of sin and death. His goal was to restore his glory in the human race.

The earth was now part of the cosmic war. Satan claimed dominion over the planet and God's rescue plan had to be activated. In sending Adam and Eve out of Eden, God demonstrated both his judgment and mercy. He again demonstrated his compassionate care by providing safety measures for relationships affected by sin.<sup>144</sup> As DuBose noticed, this is the first time the open language of sending appears in Scripture.<sup>145</sup> Describing the fact that God addresses first the serpent with words concerning humanity's redemption, Robertson recognized that "a cosmic drama is being enacted" by the serpent crawling on the ground and the imagery of crushing the head and hurting the heel, as a symbolic reminder of ultimate defeat.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Gen 3:14-24.

<sup>145</sup> DuBose, *God Who Sends*, 41.

<sup>146</sup> Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, 95. He asserts that "the divine initiative in this establishment of animosity must be underscored. God himself shall perpetuate a continuing warfare. . . . God shall intervene sovereignly to assure conflict between mankind and Satan" (96).

This background not only makes sense for all the stories in the Bible but provides the key for a correct missional reading of it. God's restoring mission starts in the universe, before the earth is created, and ends only when sin is eradicated from the universe. Against this background, all God's covenants with humans become just contextualized limited phases in the larger covenant between God the Father and the Son.<sup>147</sup>

Although the scholarly world places a heavy emphasis on God's covenant with Abraham, a better place to begin is back in time at the covenant between God and the human race in Gen 3 as a reflection of the "everlasting" covenant within the godhead.<sup>148</sup> This reflects the master missionary plan, and portrays the role of Jesus' sacrifice. The whole universe depends on its outcome, so all its citizens are interested in the developing story of humanity.

The God of the Jewish Scriptures is both the God who made heaven and earth and the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; both the God whose loving purpose is at work in all the nations and the God who chose Israel alone and chose to identify himself actually to the other nations as the God of Israel; both the God who fills heaven and earth and the God who dwells in the midst of his own people.<sup>149</sup>

Using this hermeneutical key, Adam, Noah, Abraham, Israel, and the Church become only chapters in the larger story and process of mission. Genesis 3 presents us with the restoration promise of Jesus, which also reflects his own mission: to crush the serpent's head. As a result of sin, the curse is part of God's mission to restore nature and

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<sup>147</sup> Eph 3:9; Col 1:26, 27; Heb 9:26; Gal 3:29; Eccl 1:9, 10.

<sup>148</sup> Eph 3:9; Col 1:26, 27; Heb 9:26.

<sup>149</sup> Bauckham, *Bible and Mission*, 9.

all creatures to the original state and the original level of relationships.<sup>150</sup> There is no doubt that all nations were in God's sight, without discrimination. Abraham's choice by God was not an afterthought or a solution to the crisis of sin as some suggest. The transition moment is found in Gen 3, not in Gen 12. The covenants with Adam and Noah already pointed to all their descendants and all nations.<sup>151</sup>

#### Genesis 4-11

The issue of obedience toward God's commands surfaces again in Gen 4. Although there is no specific command to bring a lamb as a sacrifice, the previous three chapters in Genesis form the necessary background to understand the issues involved and the need for a substitutionary sacrifice. The difference between Cain and Abel's sacrifices indicates not only obedience to God's requirements, but also two particular understandings of obedience and mission. Abel's lamb symbolizes God's mediatorial role in offering grace to others. Cain's produce does not carry such symbolism, his defiance indicating rather a selfish expectation to be blessed by God, without a specific orientation towards serving the surrounding world.

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<sup>150</sup> The curse of death was announced before Adam and Eve sinned (Gen 2:17). It is a natural outcome of disobedience, and it is a reaction of God's character against sin. "Cursing and blessing, life and death—these are the alternatives faced by man under the covenant of creation. The outcome focuses on the probation test" (Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, 86).

<sup>151</sup> Gen 3:15; 9:9, 12. Due to the fact that the term for covenant (*b<sup>e</sup>rith*) appears only in Gen 6, many theologians deny the existence of a covenant before Gen 6. Robertson introduces the covenant of creation based on the relationship between God and humans and on the requirements stipulated, characteristics of the covenant. "By the very act of creating man in his own likeness and image, God established a unique relationship between himself and creation. In addition to this sovereign creation-act, God spoke to man, thus determining precisely the role of man in creation. Through this creating/speaking relationship, God established sovereignly a life-and-death bond. This original bond between God and man may be called the covenant of creation" (*The Christ of the Covenants*, 67).

After Cain kills Abel, God approaches Cain to let him know the consequences of his actions. The merciful curse was that he would be a “restless wanderer on the earth.”<sup>152</sup> But Cain protests such a permanent centrifugal on-the-move life as being too harsh. God allows him to live and settle, and Cain builds the first city mentioned in the Bible.<sup>153</sup> Gen 4 records the first genealogy of a settled tribe.

Genesis 5 contains Seth’s genealogy. It is very interesting that, in this genealogy, Enoch is twice mentioned as “walking with God.”<sup>154</sup> No other individual in the genealogy is referred to as “walking with God.” Could this be a recognition that a close relationship with God implied movement? This possibility seems to be confirmed by the fact that his disappearance is attributed to his proximity to the Creator, and that his contemporaries noticed his regular trips were missing. His mission clearly involved “walking.”

Genesis 6 introduces Noah and the story of the Flood. It is worth noticing that at the end of the story, when Noah and his family leave the ark, God repeats the original blessing given to Adam in Gen 1:28. Noah was supposed to “be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth” in the same centrifugal sense.<sup>155</sup> He was also to regain dominion over the creatures throughout the earth. Later, the text indicates that Noah’s descendants “scattered” over the whole earth as God commanded.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Gen 4:12. Justice would have required “life for life, eye for eye, and tooth for tooth” (Matt 5:38; cf. Exod 21:23-24).

<sup>153</sup> Gen 4:17.

<sup>154</sup> Gen 5:22, 24.

<sup>155</sup> Gen 9:1, 7.

<sup>156</sup> Gen 9:19.

Genesis 10 records that the nations “scattered” on the earth, “by their clans and languages, in their territories and nations.”<sup>157</sup> It seems that before an important moment in God’s history or mission there is a list of nations, like in Gen 11 (or a list of ancestors, a genealogy, or a family tree, like in Matt 1). The enumeration of nations also includes the territories occupied by them or where they settled.

In contrast to these repeated “scatterings,” Gen 11 presents the story of Babel, a clear rebellion against God’s command to spread over the whole earth.<sup>158</sup> In fact, the outcome of this encounter between God and the flood survivors and their offspring is another “scattering,” this time accompanied by the multiplication and confusion of languages.<sup>159</sup> There is a connection between disobeying God’s instruction to disperse over the face of the earth and their open rebellion against the God of heaven whom they want to reach. It parallels the rebellion of Lucifer who wanted to become like the Most High.

From the cosmic conflict perspective, the hermeneutical arch that covers the missional reading of the Bible starts before time and ends after time. There is no longer a necessity to detach the first eleven chapters in Genesis from the rest of the mission story. Instead, these chapters lay the foundation for the rest of salvation history.<sup>160</sup> It becomes

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<sup>157</sup> Gen 10:31, 32. It seems that the formula “families, languages, countries, tribes” is a language device to indicate the totality of people on earth. The same pattern is repeated in Rev 14 (and other passages) closing the hermeneutical arch of the Scripture. An echo of this formula is found in the Great Commissions found in the New Testament.

<sup>158</sup> Gen 11:4.

<sup>159</sup> Gen 11:8, 9.

<sup>160</sup> M. Thomas Starkes shows that in Gen 1-11 the whole human family “is painted in broad strokes” (*The Foundations for Missions* [Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1981], 43. Everything that happens in these chapters has the whole humanity as target.

clear that humans, as well as the citizens of the universe, needed time to see the effects of sin. In the cosmic conflict perspective Gen 3-11 no longer presents a failed mission of God,<sup>161</sup> but details why justice is part of God's mission and why sin has to be blotted out from creation.<sup>162</sup> Since sin is all-pervasive and affects not only the earth but also the heavenly realm, it becomes clear that Abraham is not the solution for sin; God is.<sup>163</sup> At the end of Gen 11, it also becomes clear that a human Abraham will have to continue the centrifugal "scattering" pattern to fulfill God's mission of announcing to the nations the true solution for sin.

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<sup>161</sup> Such a pessimistic view of failure in Gen 3-11 is due to the presupposition that God is supposed to act immediately; otherwise he is not an omnipotent God. Instead of trying to find the real answer, most evangelical scholars regard these chapters as a failure on God's part because it does not fit the triumphalistic (but unbalanced) picture they have of God and mission. But God is not supposed to act when we demand. God acts in his own time. A consistent God extended his grace to pre-flood people, among whom Noah is specifically linked to. Christopher Wright is even suggesting that the people in Gen 3-11 were not blessed because of their open rebellion against God (*The Mission of God*, 208). Presuppositions play a major role in understanding God and his mission in Gen 3-11. Wright needs to explain Jesus' own statement in Matt 5:45 that "he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust." God blessed Abraham long before he was tested severely in Gen 22, even during times when Abraham misrepresented God before the nations. Laban, Potiphar, Pharaoh and the Egyptians, and all the surrounding nations were blessed only because the source of blessing went centrifugally, either voluntarily or involuntarily. Obedience to God's sending brought blessing both on the missionary and the recipients of his message.

<sup>162</sup> Boyd calls this basic understanding of the cosmos a "warfare worldview. Stated most broadly, this worldview is that perspective on reality which centers on the conviction that the good and evil, fortunate or unfortunate, aspects of life are to be interpreted largely as the result of good and evil, friendly or hostile, spirits warring against each other and against us. . . . It provides a remarkably different, and a remarkably better, understanding of evil than does the classical-philosophical Christian (or any other) approach to this problem. . . . The general assumption of both the Old and the New Testament is that the earth is virtually engulfed by cosmic forces of destruction, and that evil and suffering are ultimately due to this diabolical siege" (*God at War*, 13, 20, 55).

<sup>163</sup> It seems that Abraham was chosen to prove that no man could possibly solve the problem of sin (even by sharing in God's mission), so the Son of God was necessary to come down. The whole universe was part of the cosmic conflict and was watching. We find the same answers at the end of the book of Job. God is the only answer.

## The Patriarchal Period

Many other stories and events in the Bible make sense from a missiological perspective when placed against the background of the cosmic battle.<sup>164</sup> The call of Abraham takes place against the background created by Gen 1-11, where several dispersals take place. God does not inaugurate a new “era” with Abraham, he just continues his mission inviting Abraham to join him.<sup>165</sup> Bock states that “in a sense, Abram not only is receiving a promise, he also is receiving a call. Here is a commission of the Old Testament like the Great Commission we often note in the New Testament (Matt 28:18-20; Luke 24:43-49; Acts 1:8). His call, and that of his seed connected to him, is to be a blessing to the humanity he is being called to serve. The unilateral act of God’s grace is a call to serve and be faithful.”<sup>166</sup>

God continues his missionary project and the covenant with Abraham becomes only a step in this great missionary plan. The choosing of an individual was an answer to

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<sup>164</sup> “If we take the Old Testament’s combat motif seriously, we must acknowledge that, at the very foundation of creation and in the cosmic environment of the earth, something has rebelled against God and is therefore both hostile toward God and threatening toward the world” (Boyd, *God at War*, 99).

<sup>165</sup> In fact, most biblical characters and stories in the Old Testament seem to be introduced in an abrupt way (the command to sacrifice Isaac comes in the same abrupt way in Gen 22:1; see also the introduction of Elijah in 1 Kgs 17:1), but that does not imply there was nothing before or that God did not communicate with them before. God’s initial command to Abraham to go was not made in a vacuum. Abraham may have had a particular knowledge of God or his requirements. Keith Grüneberg notes that Gen 12:1-3 is organically linked to the previous chapters and that there is no structural marker to indicate a radically new story (*Abraham, Blessing and the Nations*, 127). “Not all of chs 1-11 is exactly universal. . . . Nor is all after ch 12 particular to Israel: we learn, for example, of the origins of the Moabites and Ammonites (19:30-38), Ishmaelites (25:12-18) and Edomites (36:1-43). . . . Nor is Israel’s particular experience totally absent from chs 1-11” (ibid., 125).

<sup>166</sup> Darrell L. Bock, “Covenants in Progressive Dispensationalism,” in *Three Central Issues in Contemporary Dispensationalism: A Comparison of Traditional and Progressive Views*, ed. Herbert W. Bateman IV (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1999), 175.



a particular issue that God needed to address in the context of a greater mission.<sup>167</sup> The cosmic conflict required that God showcase a representative of the human race who had enough faith to unconditionally obey the divine commandments. Abraham was not a perfect example, and several times he failed God by focusing on himself.<sup>168</sup> Only when he allowed God to take control of his life and went wherever God led, was Abraham able to “walk with God” as his predecessor, Enoch, had done.<sup>169</sup>

Since God is a missionary God by nature, it is difficult to see how his intentions with Abraham and his descendants were focused only on centripetal mission in the Old Testament, as the majority of scholars believe. God begins by calling Abraham “out” and ends by making him a blessing for the nations.<sup>170</sup> A balanced reflection of God’s character must include both centrifugal and centripetal mission, as well as mercy and justice, judgment and salvation.

The mission of the angels sent to Sodom and Gomorrah, for example, equally reveals judgment and salvation.<sup>171</sup> From Abraham’s negotiation with God we learn that YHWH is willing to save and bless those who accept his righteousness. The story proves that the people of Sodom and Gomorrah rejected God and his blessing. The angels’

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<sup>167</sup> Keith Grüneberg indicates that “Abraham’s migration is part of the general dispersal of humanity” (*Abraham, Blessing and the Nations*, 140).

<sup>168</sup> See Borgman, *The Story We Haven’t Heard*, 57-101.

<sup>169</sup> Gen 17:1. “I am God the Almighty. Walk in my presence and be blameless.”

<sup>170</sup> “Chs 1-11 have suggested that Yhwh is committed to all of humanity; the giving of a special position to Abraham/Israel hardly need imply a lessening of the concern at all. Thus that others can gain blessing may, in the ultimate divine purpose, be rather more than an incidental effect of a plan for Israel: Yhwh desires to bless them for their own sake” (Grüneberg, *Abraham, Blessing and the Nations*, 176).

<sup>171</sup> Gen 19:13, 29.

mission was to save what could be saved and then destroy the rest. By agreeing to leave the city, Lot is saved while Sodom and Gomorrah fall under God's judgment. The angels' mission of justice and mercy is accomplished. Wright concurs: "It is almost as if God cannot do the one (judgment) without setting it in the context of the other (redemption). The immediate particular necessity is investigation and judgment. The ultimate universal goal is (as always was) blessing."<sup>172</sup>

Abraham's mission, often interpreted to bring blessing, involves curses, too.<sup>173</sup> In the cosmic conflict framework these curses make perfect sense. Since Abraham is God's representative, when people curse Abraham they actually curse God, so the curse is returned on them. The same concept is later found in Isa 60:12 and Zech 8:13.

One of the most difficult passages to interpret in the classic "blessing" approach, Gen 22, finds its solution in the cosmic conflict. Isaac's sacrifice was clearly God's command, and a necessary part of both Abraham's and Isaac's experience. Abraham had to prove his allegiance and to show his commitment to God's mission, to trust him even when the evidences seemed to indicate otherwise. It was part of his mission to give all glory to God. The heavenly voice in Gen 22:12 confirmed that Abraham succeeded in his mission and passed the test.

Joseph experienced a heart-wrenching separation from his family. Sold as a slave by his own brothers, Joseph had a hard time accepting that God was with him or had any mission for him. But later in the story, he remembered the childhood dreams, received confirmation, and became convinced that God had a plan with him that took him in a

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<sup>172</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God*, 361.

<sup>173</sup> Gen 12:3.

centrifugal direction. After the emotional reunion with his family, Joseph declared that God sent him before his brothers to save their lives.<sup>174</sup> Even the cruelest actions could be turned in favor of God's saving mission.

This passage is profound in its covenantal and salvific implications. There is more than providence here. Joseph's words reach both back to the Abrahamic covenant and forward to the Exodus deliverance. The Hebrew people later corroborated Joseph's conviction that God sent him to Egypt and it is not surprising that Hebrew hymnody repeated the sending language in the celebration of God's redemptive leadership in Joseph's life. The sending of Joseph was seen as a prelude to the sending of Moses and Aaron (Ps 105:17, 26) and, therefore, of the Exodus.<sup>175</sup>

### The Mosaic Period

The sending of Moses and Aaron to Pharaoh represents a special episode in the master mission plan. The two brothers are to convey God's request to let the Hebrew people leave Egypt to bring glory to God by worshipping him. The message contains a choice offered to Pharaoh but also the announcement of the plagues. God's balanced character is again reflected in Moses' mission: grace and judgment.<sup>176</sup> The intended liberation is to become a foretaste of the final liberation of creation from the dominion of Satan. The plagues and the final destruction of Pharaoh's army are paralleled in the last chapters of the book of Revelation. God's mission will be fulfilled and all glory finally returned to the rightful owner.

In its later journey, Israel is sometimes sent to erase certain nations from the earth's surface by killing their entire population. Such a mission is not welcome in any of

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<sup>174</sup> Gen 45:5, 7-8.

<sup>175</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God*, 41-42.

<sup>176</sup> Moses' initial independent attempt to liberate Israel ended in failure. He used justice only, killing an Egyptian.

the classical hermeneutical approaches of mission, but perfectly explainable in the cosmic conflict framework.<sup>177</sup> God sent them, so the same pattern for centrifugal mission is present, although with a judgment or executor purpose.<sup>178</sup> Referring to the imagery of redemption through the crushing of the seed of Satan, Robertson recognizes “a principle of God’s dealings which has continued throughout the ages. The deliverance of God’s people always comes through the destruction of God’s enemies. This basic principle supplies the only adequate solution to some of the most difficult problems of the Old Testament interpretation.”<sup>179</sup>

The role of land in this missional framework needs to be emphasized. Land was very important in the Old Testament to create a basis for mission. When entering the Promised Land, Israel was told to kill the Canaanites so they will not be a temptation toward idolatry and rob God of his glory.<sup>180</sup> The importance of “cleansing” the Canaanites from the land came not only from a “holiness” perspective, but also from the need that Israel’s focus and energy would not be turned away from mission. However, Israel decided it was easier to just let them live in their midst and hoped a centripetal mission would win them for good. Laziness was justified by mercy. God wanted them to act centrifugally, but they thought centripetally was better. Time proved them wrong.

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<sup>177</sup> Unfortunately, here I have to disagree with Wright who believes that “the great actions of God in the history of Israel were not merely cosmic theater” (*The Mission of God*, 262). The cosmic conflict was, in fact, the main reason.

<sup>178</sup> Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, 102. He justifies the warfare in Joshua’s days, as well as the imprecatory Psalms. See also Meredith G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), 158ff.

<sup>179</sup> Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, 102.

<sup>180</sup> “God intended to use Israel as the agent of his historical judgment on the wickedness of Canaanite nations” (Wright, *The Mission of God*, 457).

God gave the land as a gift, so Israel was not to fight for it; God promised to fight for them.<sup>181</sup> He also gave them a particular theology, laws, institutions, and ethical imperatives to preserve its purpose. When Israel neglected the role these institutions and laws were supposed to fulfill, God decided to restore it. He first worked through a remnant, and finally he came down himself.

### The Sanctuary and the Temple

The Sanctuary and its services occupy a large segment of the Old Testament. The attention to minute details sometimes seems exaggerated. All pieces of furniture, the sacrifices, the utensils, even the structure of the Sanctuary were designed to teach Israel about God's purpose and mission to eradicate sin from the universe.<sup>182</sup> His mercy and justice were equally portrayed in this window into the cosmic conflict perspective.<sup>183</sup>

The entire missionary plan, the heavenly strategy, was clearly exposed during the events that took place at the tabernacle. All sacrifices symbolized Jesus' future death on

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<sup>181</sup> Deut 1:30; 3:22; 20:4; Josh 10:25; cf. Exod 14:14.

<sup>182</sup> Roy E. Beacham believes that "in the Old Testament, the 'tabernacle' or 'temple' was, perhaps, the single, most important "objectifier" of the otherwise invisible God." He indicates that the tabernacle "functioned as a reflector of God" ("Missions through Modeling: A Call to Holiness," in Glenny and Smallman, *Missions in a New Millennium*, 70, 71).

<sup>183</sup> The ark of the covenant was covered by the "seat of mercy." At the same time, "YHWH is enthroned above the ark of the covenant (Exod 25:22; Num 7:89; cf. 1 Sam 4:4; 2 Sam 6:2, etc.). So the sanctuary is his earthly administrative center, and his place of enthronement represents his authority, character, and reputation for justice, upon which his rule is founded (cf. Ps 97:2), just as the throne of a human king stands for his administration (e.g., 2 Sam 14:9). . . . YHWH cannot abandon his justice when he condemns or when he forgives. He must maintain balance and harmony between justice and kindness/mercy, the two sides of his character. Attempting to uphold kindness without justice would have the unkind results of chaos and unchecked evil. Canceling culpability for wrongs without at least a token reminder of the just retribution that the sinner would otherwise face could beget wantonness rather than reformation" (Gane, *Cult and Character*, 319, 320-321).

the cross in behalf of the sinner.<sup>184</sup> The sacrificial system and Levitical ritual reflected the fundamental missional orientation of Israel and also of God. All symbols that Jesus later used to compare himself with were present.<sup>185</sup> The Light of the World, the Bread of Life, the Lamb of God, the mediatorial role of the priest, all illustrated the reality that was to come.<sup>186</sup>

The Day of Atonement pointed to the final Day of Judgment and the cleansing of the universe from the effects of sin.<sup>187</sup> Everything in the Sanctuary was designed to teach about the cosmic conflict and to involve the worshipper in it. “This whole world, with the sign of the Sabbath over it, is meant to be a sanctuary, a place of ‘rest’ for God, a place where God’s sovereignty is acclaimed and where God may dwell with God’s creation. Tabernacle and temple are truly the world in microcosm.”<sup>188</sup>

The Sanctuary was supposed to be mobile, so Israel could take it with them during their journeys. Special instructions were given so God’s character would be

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<sup>184</sup> “The Israelite system of rituals is all about theodicy” (ibid., 333).

<sup>185</sup> G. K. Beale develops the idea that the Temple was supposed to have a cosmic symbolism. He considers that the outer court was a symbol of the visible earth, the holy place represented the visible heavens, while the holy of holies “stood for the invisible heavenly dimension of the cosmos where God dwelt” (*The Temple and the Church’s Mission*, 48).

<sup>186</sup> John 8:12; 6:35; 1:29; 1 Tim 2:5. Most of the Sanctuary elements were supposed to replace the lost features of Eden. For example, the face-to face communication to God, lost when the first humans had to leave Eden, was symbolized by the incense on the altar. God’s mission for the restoration of the communication between heaven and earth was already underway. The tree of life was symbolized by the showbread, while the light in the lamp stand symbolized the garments of light and the clothing of righteousness Adam and Eve lost when they rebelled against God.

<sup>187</sup> “The presence of God in Israel’s tabernacle and temple looked backward at his presence in Eden, and forward to his ultimate presence among all nations in a renewed creation (Rev 21-22)” (Wright, *The Mission of God*, 334).

<sup>188</sup> Okoye, *Israel and the Nations*, 32.

correctly presented in a balanced way. As an instructional device it could be taken to the nations so the nations would be able to learn about and see God's glory.<sup>189</sup> But Israel thought otherwise, and decided to become like all the other nations around them. They requested a king, and the king decided to build a Temple like the temples the surrounding nations possessed. However, this Temple only partially fulfilled its missionary role, since only a few from the nations had the chance to see God's glory.

The fixed Temple was not God's ideal. Although God decided to choose a place in one of the tribes to "put his name there" it was only because Israel started to offer their burnt offerings everywhere they pleased, frequently "under every spreading tree" where the Canaanites worshipped their idols.<sup>190</sup> Even when the location was chosen, the mobile tabernacle was the instrument God continued to use to show his presence. It took generations until David decided to honor God by building a glorious Temple for him.

God accepted David's and Solomon's efforts and blessed the Temple with his presence, providing even the building plan and making sure the symbolism was preserved. However, the Temple fit just one side of its mission, the centripetal one. The symbols remained the same, but its mobility disappeared. The intended pedagogical role was reduced to only impact Israel. Later on, Israel built a court for the nations around the

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<sup>189</sup> Beacham states that "the edifice served as a means of revealing the otherwise unobservable essence and character of God to the world at large." He believes that "by looking to the temple, the place where God has chosen to manifest His character, 'all the peoples of the earth may know that the Lord is God; there is no one else' (1 Kgs 8:60)" ("Missions through Modeling: A Call to Holiness," 77). Since the tabernacle contained the "testimony" of God (the Law), "the character and nature of God could be known by examining these documents" (ibid., 78). Beacham recognizes the role of God's holiness and its *centrifugal* nature, but he immediately refutes the existence of any centrifugal "mandate" for Israel to take this holiness to the nations.

<sup>190</sup> Deut 12:1-5. Israel had asked for a king, to be like other nations, and the king in turn proposed to build a Temple, like all the other nations had. The departure from God's original plan for Israel brought a departure from God's original mission for Israel.

Temple, but only the gentiles coming to Jerusalem had the chance to see God's glory. Unfortunately, the Temple became just a reflection of a centripetal, inward-looking nation.

At the peak of its glory, during Solomon's time, people came to hear the wise king's words.<sup>191</sup> Solomon was supposed to expand the borders of Israel by making God's glory known. Unfortunately he stayed home and others came to him to listen to his wisdom.<sup>192</sup> Instead of offering other nations the knowledge of God, Solomon made alliances sealed by marriage with most of the neighboring nations. His wives and concubines brought their idols and Israel worshiped those idols instead of God. Soon Israel forgot about God and apostatized.

The unbalanced centripetal-only mission soon showed its results. When Solomon no longer gave glory to God by his example and life, mission was completely forgotten in Israel. The same lack of centrifugal activity brought down both David and Solomon allowing them to turn their attention on themselves. The cosmic conflict framework presupposes both centripetal and centrifugal aspects in order to correctly represent God's character and his missionary strategy.

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<sup>191</sup> Goerner recognizes that "it now became a matter of worldwide interest what happened in Israel. It now was of cosmic concern who was on the throne; whether he was a good king or bad; how many children he had; how long he reigned; and so forth in minute detail." However, he claims that "the world did not know it, but the fate of the nations rested largely with *this* nation" (Goerner, "*Thus It Is Written*," 45).

<sup>192</sup> It may be argued that God blessed Solomon with wisdom, and God's plan was that people will come to Jerusalem to listen to Solomon (see the queen of Sheba). However, God's original plan was not monarchy. To claim that this centripetal mission was God's original plan for mission is to forget the historical development of Israel. God respects people's freedom of choice, but this should not be read backwards as constituting his original plan. God works with people at their level of understanding and in the circumstances they bring upon themselves. The history of Israel should not be confused with God's original missionary plan.



## The Judges

The history of the judges illustrates the result of not fulfilling God's mission. Although the book begins with a list of victories against the Canaanites, the last part of chapter one lists the territories which Israel spared, and as a result "they will be thorns in your sides and their gods will be a snare to you."<sup>193</sup> Their disobedience resulted in God's intervention by raising up judges. It is interesting that these are not called leaders, kings, or guides. Their title reflects precisely the mission given them by God to restore justice in the land and between God and his servant people.<sup>194</sup> God had to fulfill the curses that came with the blessings.<sup>195</sup> Thus, the surrounding pagan nations were allowed to survive and were given an indirect mission: to test Israel's relation with God.<sup>196</sup> Unfortunately, Israel did not fulfill its own mission to make the Creator God known to the nations; instead, Israel "took their daughters in marriage and gave their own daughters to their sons, and served their gods."<sup>197</sup>

The cosmic conflict is illustrated frequently by the disobedience of Israel. God's enemy hinders God's mission by luring his people into worshipping idols or the so-called gods. Every time Israel cries for help, a judge is raised up by God to restore the people's

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<sup>193</sup> Judg 2:3.

<sup>194</sup> "The judges are no permanent solution either to the sin problem or to Israel's leadership crisis caused by Joshua's death" (House, *Old Testament Theology*, 222).

<sup>195</sup> Judg 2:15.

<sup>196</sup> Judg 2:21-23; 3:1-5.

<sup>197</sup> Judg 3:6.

knowledge about the true God and their own reason for existence. The wars Israel was faced with are directly related to their following other gods.<sup>198</sup>

When God chose a judge, he entrusted the person with a mission. A clear sending accompanied the announcement of the task.<sup>199</sup> Gideon was instructed to teach Israel who the true God is. His mission was to restore God's name and character among God's people, and to summon Israel to communicate this truth to the surrounding nations.<sup>200</sup> Even when asked to rule over Israel, Gideon declined the offer recognizing his mission was simply to liberate Israel and restore God's name and not to be a king: "I will not rule over you, nor will my son rule over you. The LORD will rule over you."<sup>201</sup> The people's request also indicates that they had lost the awareness of their mission and were simply becoming a nation among other nations.<sup>202</sup> The issue of progressive revelation in the book of Judges can hardly be argued.

### The Kings

The story of the kings of Israel is described in the books of the Kings, the Chronicles, and also in the book of Psalms. Although Israel and its kings were supposed to be prototypes of Christ, the reality was very different. One can say most of Israel's

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<sup>198</sup> "When they chose new gods, war came to the city gates" (Judg 5:8). See also Judg 10:10, 13-16.

<sup>199</sup> Judg 6:14.

<sup>200</sup> As a result, Gideon was given the name Jerub-Baal indicating the conflict between God and all other entities which required to be worshipped.

<sup>201</sup> Judg 8:23

<sup>202</sup> This attitude is poetically illustrated in the parable of Jotham (Judg 9:7-15) where animals are looking for a king in all odd places and asking even the thorn bush to be their king.

kings' records present a deformed image of God.<sup>203</sup> Saul's rulership ended in disaster, both for his own house and for Israel. David's kingship was marked by internal strife and struggle, especially in the last part. Solomon's time on the throne was remembered by the later number of wives and concubines and the idols they introduced to Israel. The cosmic conflict showed its implications in the lives of each king that followed. Each one is described by the stance he took vis-à-vis God. Every king who is presented in positive terms brought a spiritual revival and reform in Israel's life and restored the true worship of God.

It is frequently argued that the period of the kings illustrates the best centripetal missionary activity. It is true that there is the example of the Queen of Sheba coming to see Solomon and listen to his wisdom from God. But there is no record of any direct missionary result or acceptance of the true God. On top of everything else, the monarchy period witnessed a lot of conquering by military force, which can hardly be defined as a missionary method especially when it was not God-ordained. It was driven by a political rather than religious goal to incorporate other nations into Israel that justified force, the use of nepotism, corruption, heavy taxation, and religious compromise.

The kings tried more and more to look like the nations which surrounded them rather than follow the missionary goal of presenting the true God to them.<sup>204</sup> Most often the kings assumed that what they were doing was God's plan. This period marked the

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<sup>203</sup> "The state became 'God's kingdom' composed of 'God's chosen people' ruled by 'God's anointed son. The purpose of God in history came to be equated with maintaining the existing order. But merely existing as the status quo could hardly be equated with being a blessing to the nations" (Glasser et al., *Announcing the Kingdom*, 107).

<sup>204</sup> "The deterioration of Israelite society began when the people persisted in demanding a monarchy" (ibid., 118).

transformation of the Tabernacle into a Temple, thus limiting its centrifugal missionary capacity. The results of departing from God's original missionary intentions led Israel to division and later on to almost complete dissolution. The exile was God's emergency plan to restore the nation and to offer them a new chance to act as God's missionary.

### The Psalms

The psalms contain references to all the important events in Israel's history. As a unique expression of divine revelation, the psalms became "one of the most effective means to impress the heart with spiritual truth."<sup>205</sup> Since the psalms were sung both as part of the liturgical services at the Temple in Jerusalem and at home, "who can tell the far-reaching influence of those inspirational liturgies of sacred songs that praised the faithful love and mercy of Israel's God?"<sup>206</sup>

These poetic expressions combine feelings and revelation. Although the psalms can be classified in different genres, the bigger picture emerging from them is God's wholesome character and the reflection of the cosmic conflict at the personal level. Besides being portrayed as powerful and merciful, God is often described as righteous and just.<sup>207</sup> The theme of judgment is frequently present in the Psalms.<sup>208</sup> It is also very

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<sup>205</sup> Hans K. LaRondelle, *Deliverance in the Psalms: Messages of Hope for Today* (Berrien Springs, MI: First Impressions, 1983), 4.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>207</sup> Ps 4:1; 7:9; 9:16; 76:9.

<sup>208</sup> For example Ps 1:5; 7:6, 11; 9:4, 7-8; 75:2, 7.

interesting to discover that people who declare that God does not punish are called “blasphemous.”<sup>209</sup> The concern for an inclusive character of God is evident.

God is also described as a king ruling over his kingdom.<sup>210</sup> However, the location of his kingdom is referred to both as here on earth and in heavenly places.<sup>211</sup> The Davidic kingdom was considered to be theocratic because David was called, anointed, and ordained by God.<sup>212</sup> But David’s kingship role prefigured in a typological way Christ’s eschatological rulership.<sup>213</sup> Because of the overlap between the heavenly and the earthly kingdom, anyone threatening Israel’s kingdom was considered an enemy of God.

The nations are seen both as the target of God’s blessing but also as God’s enemies. The nations are invited to praise God, to worship him, and to thank him for all his blessings. He needs to be recognized as their ruler and Lord, but also as their shepherd and guide. Geographically, God is not limited to the territory of Israel but he is God of the entire world. Israel is called to represent God and make him known in his full splendor.<sup>214</sup>

Two aspects call for particular attention in the Psalms: the curses that join the blessings, and the imprecatory psalms. Psalm 1 launches an appeal for everyone under the sun: choose the blessing, not the curse. The righteous are presented in contrast to the

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<sup>209</sup> Ps 10:13.

<sup>210</sup> Ps 5:2; 10:16; 20:9; 29:10; 44:4; 47:6; 84:4; 89:18; 98:2; 145:1; 149:1.

<sup>211</sup> God is described as a great king over all the earth (Ps 47:2, 7), a great king (48:2), a great king above all gods (95:3), the king of glory (24:7-10), and even as “my king” (68:24).

<sup>212</sup> Ps 72.

<sup>213</sup> See Pss 2 and 110.

<sup>214</sup> See Ps 2, and also Pss 33, 46, 65, 66, 67, 72, 87, 96, 98, 115, 117, and 145.

wicked based on personal preferences. The choice belongs to the individual and not to God who offers equal chances to everyone. God's sovereignty is voluntarily restrained in order to allow the individual to decide. Free will becomes vital in the process, as well as the law that makes the difference between the blessed and the wicked.<sup>215</sup>

The imprecatory psalms constitute a problem for the contemporary Christian and have been interpreted in many ways in order to avoid connecting a merciful New Testament Jesus with the "Old Testament God."<sup>216</sup> Some authors even rejected the inspiration and authority of such passages which seem to contradict Jesus' approach.<sup>217</sup> A closer look at the imprecatory psalms reveals that these are theocentric passages which defend the name and character of God. Because the Davidic kingdom is considered God's kingdom, all threats on David are seen as threats on God and his reputation. "The war against Israel is the war against Israel's covenant God."<sup>218</sup> The missionary face of God includes not only grace and mercy but also justice and curses.<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> The law as referred to in the Old Testament (and particularly in the Psalms) is never separated into moral and ceremonial or other types of laws. "When the psalm poets use such terms as 'testimonies,' 'statutes,' 'commandments,' 'ordinances,' 'precepts,' 'word,' 'promise,' and even 'the fear of the Lord' (Ps 19:9) as synonyms of the word 'Torah,' they always have in mind the Torah as an undivided whole, centered in the sanctuary services. . . . The holy law of God remained always *covenant law*" (LaRondelle, *Deliverance in the Psalms*, 45).

<sup>216</sup> Examples of imprecatory psalms are Pss 35, 58, 69, 109, and 137.

<sup>217</sup> Luke 23:34. See also Stephen's words in Acts 7:60.

<sup>218</sup> LaRondelle, *Deliverance in the Psalms*, 21. See Pss 74:18-23; 79:6-7, 12-13; 83:1-5. "David as the theocratic king, fights the battles of the Lord (2 Sam 5:24)" (ibid., 20).

<sup>219</sup> "The prophetic outburst of imprecation may reflect the vibrations of divine anger. One should not hastily conclude that the imprecations of David were mere personal fits of anger. . . . The New Testament does not abolish the final judgment for the wicked either. Jesus warned 'woe unto you' several times in Matthew 23, and even had anger aroused in His heart (Mark 3:5)" (ibid., 22).

The psalms present the cosmic conflict as developing not only in heaven but also on this earth as part of the daily life of humans. The imprecations and curses expressed by the psalmists are not simply reflecting their emotional reactions against personal enemies but they reveal human involvement in the cosmic conflict.

### The Prophets

When the royalty or the judges forgot their appointed role to reflect the divine character, God brought the prophets on the scene. Most prophetic messages are contained in the prophetic books, but one can find mentioned prophets and their messages in the historical books, too. These special messengers called Israel and their leaders back to God and warned them about the tragic consequences of abandoning the Creator and sustainer of all. The prophets reminded Israel of the curses that were going to fall on them as a natural result of turning their backs on God. Using metaphors and figures of speech, the prophets insisted on the importance of choosing to stay on God's side in the cosmic conflict.

The very existence of Israel as a distinct nation was linked to their mission and service to the surrounding nations. However, Israel believed that they were chosen anyway and would always have a privileged status. The prophets reminded them that this was not the case, and that God would not tolerate their indifference or even opposition toward him. Israel enjoyed listening to prophecies talking about the restoration of their nation, but they completely neglected the conditions necessary to reach this status.<sup>220</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> “The promises that God made in covenant with Israel at Sinai were conditioned upon their obedience. The Sinaitic covenant offered no unconditional promises” (Glasser et al., *Announcing the Kingdom*, 121).

The prophets did not only announce a brighter or gloomy future for Israel, but addressed punctual issues in Israel's current social, economic, political, and religious life. They warned about greed, oppression, and exploitation manifested by the elite of the nation. They pointed out the injustice that plagued the nation, and indicated that the decayed state of society was not an accident but the unfortunate result of the people's own actions.<sup>221</sup>

Speaking about judgment, Amos indicates plainly that Israel faces more serious consequence than other nations precisely because of their special status as elect people.<sup>222</sup> Through the message of judgment, God keeps the consequences of their choices vividly before the eyes of Israel. The message of Jonah, although targeting an enemy of Israel, speaks about the same judgment because of oppression, injustice, and economic inequity. The standards in the cosmic conflict are the same for everyone, but the punishment seems to be more severe according to privilege and responsibility.

The blessings promised and the judgment announced should never be dissociated. Both are part of God's message and of his covenant. The judgment is necessary when the standards of God, expressed in his law, are rejected. The rejection of these standards is often related to a tendency towards ease and luxury. It's almost impossible to talk about

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<sup>221</sup> For example, Zechariah speaks about God restoring Israel in chapter 8 of his book, but few connect chapters 7 and 8 because the message of the previous chapter indicates very clearly on which basis is God going to bring restoration. Without social justice there is not going to be any national restoration.

<sup>222</sup> "You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your sins" (Amos 3:2).



mission when the missionary looks for easy ways to accomplish his task or enjoys an abundant life. God's mission involves sacrifice and suffering, as described by Isaiah.<sup>223</sup>

The restoration of Israel through a remnant is part of God's grace in the covenantal relationship. However, "this remnant of Israel will be holy only because it has, like Isaiah, experienced God's cleansing judgment."<sup>224</sup> Judgment will never be separated from mercy and grace. But the remnant is not presented as exclusively being formed by ethnic Israelites. Isaiah 40-66 focuses not only on physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but includes non-Israelites and also categories of people who were restricted from entering the Tabernacle precincts, such as eunuchs and foreigners. Again, the criteria for being part of the remnant are the acceptance of God's law and covenant, and faith and obedience to the Lord.<sup>225</sup>

Ezekiel announces from exile that "God's central concern with Israel is her restoration, not as a secular, political state, but as a united theocracy, a spiritually cleansed and truly worshipping people of God. Ezekiel's focus in his restoration promises is not primarily on Israel's return to her homeland, but on her return to Yahweh."<sup>226</sup> The prophets emphasize the importance of the spiritual dimension in the life of God's people and the impact of spirituality on their mission.<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> Isa 53. See also the description of the suffering servant in the previous chapters.

<sup>224</sup> LaRondelle, *The Israel of God in Prophecy*, 86.

<sup>225</sup> Isa 56:3.

<sup>226</sup> LaRondelle, *The Israel of God in Prophecy*, 89. See also Ezek 11:18-21; 20:32-36; 36:24-33; and 37:22-26.

<sup>227</sup> "The Old Testament has an important function for the church in acting as a warning against idolatry and spiritual experimentation" (Glasser et al., *Announcing the Kingdom*, 116).

## The Exile

When Israel no longer brought glory to God and centrifugal mission became non-existent, God had to use other nations to remind Israel of its duty. The curses spoken on Mount Ebal (Deut 11:29) had to be enforced and God's justice acted out as an instrument of mercy.<sup>228</sup> The two cannot be separated. The exile, popularly seen as a result of the curse, is not only a punishment in the cosmic conflict framework but a corrective instrument. When Israel became so engrossed in selfish navel-gazing, God reminded them of their centrifugal mission.<sup>229</sup>

The dominant empires of the day made it easier for traveling to the nations, for centrifugal mission. Unfortunately, Israel focused on God's Temple, believing that his presence with them was guaranteed as long as they preserved the purity of the building and its services.<sup>230</sup> They understood the exile as being caused by the breaking of the covenant, but completely forgot that the covenant included their duty toward the nations.

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<sup>228</sup> God's justice is always accompanied by mercy, and his mercy by justice. The curses pronounced on Mount Ebal were intended to remind Israel of the consequences of abandoning God and his mission. These were also powerful reminders about God's character. On the other hand, messages of impending judgment were followed by mercy when the recipients repented. Jonah and the people at Nineveh are such an example.

<sup>229</sup> Unfortunately, God had to remind them even about centripetal mission. The prophet Micah describes in Mic 3 the deplorable situation of Israel who was so self-absorbed and arrogant that no mission was possible at all. In chap. 4, however, the prophet presents a totally different situation, with nations coming to Jerusalem (4:1-2). He refers to this time as the "last days" and the ideal picture points to an ideal time which will be brought by the person described in Mic 5. The description of the remnant is, again, suggestively balanced: as the dew, and as a lion, indicating both leadership and dispersion for service (5:7-8). Most scholars prefer to see this description as having an eschatological application.

<sup>230</sup> Later, the Maccabees' revolts were driven by the same mentality and desire to defend the Temple and the land, and to make sure God stayed with them.

Jeremiah had to remind them that the exile was not a punishment, but “a challenging mission.”<sup>231</sup>

Wright believes that Israel was to be vindicated in the exile.<sup>232</sup> However it was not Israel who needed to be vindicated but God. The nations were not Israel’s enemies but God’s instruments and his final goal. Although people believe that when Israel will be restored then the nations will be blessed, the Scripture presents just the opposite: When Israel will rediscover how to bless the nations, then Israel will be restored. The exile provided them just such an opportunity.

### The New Testament

It is useful to see how the cosmic conflict framework is reflected in the New Testament and if it supports the unity of Scripture. Although centrifugal mission is generally accepted in the New Testament, there are not many who emphasize the centripetal aspect of mission which is also abundantly present.

In the New Testament Jesus’ disciples were always interested when Jesus was going to restore Israel to its former glory and power, and to vindicate Israel in the eyes of the nations. But Jesus had a different agenda. His birth took place against the background of the cosmic conflict. The flight to Egypt was informed by the same framework. Herod was only another face of the same archenemy that sought to take Jesus’ life. His later decision to get baptized in spite of being sinless finds its answer in the same cosmic conflict.

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<sup>231</sup> “Not sinfulness but a divine challenge had caused their dispersion” (Leo Trepp, *Judaism: Development and Life* [Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1982], 25).

<sup>232</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God*, 342.

Jesus declares he follows his Father's goal and strategy. It is a war strategy that leads to frequent confrontation. The dialogue with his opponent in the wilderness indicates that Jesus has his eyes on winning in this cosmic conflict.<sup>233</sup> He is determined to do his Father's will. "God's mission determined his mission. In Jesus the radically theocentric nature of biblical mission is most clearly focused and modeled. In the obedience of Jesus, even to death, the mission of God reached its climax."<sup>234</sup>

Many scholars believe that Jesus follows a centripetal approach during his earthly lifetime, only to switch to a centrifugal one in the Great Commission and in the Acts of the Apostles.<sup>235</sup> They refer to Matt 10:5-6 as proof of his centripetal mission and his strategy to avoid the gentiles.<sup>236</sup> However, these scholars forget that the disciples, as well as Paul later on, offer hints that they knew the Old Testament prophecies and

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<sup>233</sup> Matt 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13. See also Matt 26:39, 42.

<sup>234</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God*, 66.

<sup>235</sup> John D. Harvey's statement that "Jesus' teaching on mission, however, encompassed more than his own task" is contradictory. Was he asking his disciples and followers to do something he would not do? Harvey also believes that "the disciples' post-resurrection mission was not a major element in Jesus' teaching prior to his death, it was an undertaking he anticipated and to which he alluded in advance" ("Mission in Jesus' Teaching," in Larkin and Williams, *Mission in the New Testament*, 31, 45). Harvey considers the resurrection the turning point in Jesus' ministry, status, message, and teaching about mission (ibid., 44). He is contradicted by Harris who argues that "to imagine that Jesus restricted his mission to Israel and never envisaged a Gentile mission at all—a position Alan Le Grys appears to advocate—is a misunderstanding not only of the worldview of the Gospel writers, but of Jewish and early Christian eschatology as a whole" (*Mission in the Gospels*, 51).

<sup>236</sup> The genealogy of Jesus, however, proves that he is an "impure" Jew because of the presence of gentiles in his family tree (see the discussion in Christine Hayes, *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities: Intermarriage and Conversion from the Bible to the Talmud* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2002], 19-44). The inclusion of the gentiles in his genealogy contradicted the sole concern of the scholars of his day for the "purity" of race, and suggests that God's interest has always been to include the nations and offer the knowledge of his beautiful character to all the peoples of the earth. This conclusion contradicts today's scholars' opinion that the good news of the gospel was supposed to go to the nations only with the New Testament church.

Scriptures.<sup>237</sup> As the two disciples from Emmaus and Paul would testify, the Jews had a “veil” over their eyes.

Jesus came to restore the Scriptures’ meaning and understanding; he did not bring a new and radically different meaning to it. However, the disciples did not grasp that understanding during Jesus’ life. It took some time until it dawned on them that they were always supposed to share the good news with gentiles. They were forced to admit it, although in time and only after serious reflection on their past requests for glory and honor and Jesus’ answers about a different nature of his kingdom. The illumination did not happen instantly.

Wright agrees that the “go” command in Matt 28 “is not an imperative at all in the text but a participle of attendant circumstances, an assumption—something taken for granted.”<sup>238</sup> It was not a totally new concept for the disciples, but Jesus placed it in the

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<sup>237</sup> Paul Foster points to the gradual way in which Jesus leads the disciples to the final understanding of the Great Commission. Matthew 15:21-28, 21:43, 24:14, and 26:13 are intermediary steps toward the necessary correction in their understanding of mission. He also shows that a focus on these texts only may result “in a loss of the overall emphasis that is conveyed by reading the gospel as a whole” (*Community, Law and Mission in Matthew’s Gospel* [Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2004], 219). Johannes Nissen also points to the fact that Matt 10:5 is immediately followed by v. 6 in which Jesus sends the disciples “to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” Nissen correctly argues that “this means that the mission of Jesus was from the outset intended to go beyond the frontiers to ‘the miserable ones,’ to those who were held in no esteem and even were of bad reputation” (*New Testament and Mission: Historical and Hermeneutical Perspectives* [Frankfurt am Main, Germany: Peter Lang, 1999], 28).

<sup>238</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God*, 35. Wright explains that “our mission certainly flows from the authority of the Bible. But that authority is far richer and deeper than one big biblical command we must obey. Rather, our obedience to the Great Commission, and even the Great Commission itself, is set within the context of these realities. The Great Commandment is not something extra or exotic. . . . Biblical imperatives are characteristically founded on biblical indicatives. An indicative is simply a statement of reality. A missional hermeneutic takes the indicative and the imperative of the biblical revelation with equal seriousness, and interprets each in the light of the other. . . . A missional hermeneutic cannot read biblical indicatives without their implied imperatives. Nor can it isolate biblical imperatives from the totality of the biblical indicative. It seeks a holistic understanding of mission from a holistic reading of the biblical texts” (ibid., 58, 59, 61).

natural context of their place and time.<sup>239</sup> Instead of reinforcing the disciples' eschatological expectations of the nations' inclusion into Israel, Jesus indicated the role his followers would have to play in a centrifugal way as part of the cosmic conflict "until the end."

The Great Commission in Matt 28:18-20 is a reminder of Gen 12:1-3. Both passages transmit the message "Go and be a blessing and all nations on earth will be blessed through you." Jesus is practically restoring the original mission that was misrepresented by Israel over the centuries. As a result, in Genesis we have the Great Commission for those who deny its presence in the Old Testament. It is only expressed in terms relevant to the culture of Abraham and the people of his era. When teaching and baptizing become the norm of the day, Jesus employs those elements. But the fundamental principle of obedience remains the same all through the cosmic conflict, as well as the command to go in a centrifugal direction.

Jesus' approach was not based on a "revolutionary hermeneutic" when compared with the teaching of the Old Testament, but it certainly was revolutionary for the Jews of his day. He did not accept the self-honoring tweaking of the Jewish Scriptures promoted by the Scribes and the Pharisees of the time but restored their meaning pointing to the magisterial role of his sacrifice on the cross in the cosmic conflict. His statement "I saw Satan falling like lightning from heaven" is just an expression of the same controversy.<sup>240</sup>

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<sup>239</sup> See the counterarguments in Alan Le Grys, *Preaching to the Nations: The Origins of Mission in the Early Church* (London: SPCK, 1998), 40-51. Le Grys claims that the form of the Commission is the result of early Christian redactional activity. Such a reading weakens the missionary force and width of the Commission.

<sup>240</sup> Luke 10:18.

His parables abundantly reflect the cosmic conflict and the personal decision required from every human being.<sup>241</sup>

Even today, scholars contend that Jesus did not show any openness toward the non-Jews during his ministry. The popular opinion is that he shared the Jews' view that the gentiles are impure and should be kept at a distance from the "chosen" and pure nation. For example, even when Jesus meets with the Greeks who ask to see him, John A. Dennis denies that the "Greeks" in John 12:20 are ethnic Greeks, but Jews from the Greek Diaspora.<sup>242</sup>

The popular assumption that the early church was a movement with "a specifically missionary character" ignores historical and textual facts.<sup>243</sup> The early Christians were forced to flee Jerusalem because of persecution, not because they

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<sup>241</sup> For example the parable of the sower (Mark 4:15), the discussion about the divided nature of Satan's kingdom (Luke 11:18), or the casualties of this conflict (Luke 13:16; 22:31; John 13:27).

<sup>242</sup> "In light of these conclusions," states Dennis, "although [John] 7:35 and 12:20 may reflect some kind of openness to non-Israelites who have already begun to worship the God of Israel, they nevertheless say nothing about a discrete mission to the Gentiles and certainly do not demand that the community shifted its mission frontier from Israel to Gentiles." John A. Dennis, *Jesus' Death and the Gathering of the True Israel* (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 307.

<sup>243</sup> "The disciples did not, however, become missionaries immediately after Jesus' ascension. Their Lord had said early in His ministry that He was sent only to 'the lost sheep of the house of Israel' (Matt 10:6). Nothing He said later seems to have modified the disciples' acceptance of that limitation for their own life and ministry. Modern Christians are puzzled at the reluctance of the apostolic group at Jerusalem to move out into the world preaching the gospel and establishing new congregations of believers. It seems to us that given the resurrection, the ascension' and Pentecost the result should have been an immediate push outward. But Luke's narrative in Acts is careful to show that such was not the case. Several years passed before anything like that took place" (Robert Duncan Culver, *A Greater Commission: A Theology for World Missions* [Chicago: The Moody Bible Institute, 1984], xiii). See also Scott McKnight's arguments in *A Light among the Gentiles: Jewish Missionary Activity in the Second Temple Period* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1991), especially 102-117.

understood the centrifugal orientation of the Commission.<sup>244</sup> The early church had for a long time serious problems accepting gentiles on the same level as Jewish believers.<sup>245</sup> The reluctance of Peter (Acts 10) and the fierce opposition to the gentiles that led to the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) illustrate very clearly that the “movement” was still centripetally oriented.<sup>246</sup> The harassment “the brethren” applied to Paul is another example of the centripetal vision of the early church.<sup>247</sup> Although a missionary for the gentiles, Paul always approached the Jews in an attempt to reach them first and widen

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<sup>244</sup> Eckhard J. Schnabel confirms that “the first persecution, instigated by the authorities in Jerusalem against the followers of Jesus in A.D. 31/32, led to missionary expansion that brought the gospel to the coastal regions, to Samaria and to Antioch, the capital of the province of Syria” (*Early Christian Mission* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004], 2:1533).

<sup>245</sup> Michael Green analyzes the gradation of Jews, Proselytes, God-fearers and plain gentiles and concludes that in the Jewish understanding “no man could be a ‘son of Abraham’ in the fullest sense unless he was born a Jew” (*Evangelism in the Early Church* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003], 46). In addition, Schnabel shows that “the greater openness toward Hellenistic culture did not lead to the abolition of the cultural and ritual barriers that the Mosaic law erected between Israel, the people of God, and the Gentiles. . . . This fundamentally positive stance is not synonymous with an active endeavor to convince Gentiles who worship other gods and who practice different customs that their religious convictions are wrong, that their behavior is improper, that they must believe in the God of Israel and that they need to be integrated into the Jewish community. An interest for Judaism on the part of the Gentiles is not synonymous with an interest for ‘lost’ Gentiles who need to be converted” (*Early Christian Mission*, 1:170). Bevans and Schroeder also notice that “the struggle to move beyond the centripetal dynamic of Judaism and not only to be open to the Gentiles but to seek them out was a major concern of Paul in his letters and of much of the gospel tradition” (Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004], 11).

<sup>246</sup> Naymond H. Keathley divides the book of Acts in three sections: pre-gentile, transition, and gentile mission. He contends that the gentile mission actually began only after the Jerusalem Council (*The Church’s Mission to the Gentiles* [Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys, 1999], 3-62).

<sup>247</sup> Acts 15:5. It is worthy to note that Paul is basing his message in the letters to the different churches on God’s balanced character. Ralph P. Martin writes that “a key to viewing Paul’s perspectives on the divine action and purpose is seen in the observation—to anticipate our conclusion—that Paul reasons from who/what God is and what he has done to how his people and servants should respond and act. . . . Here we focus on theology in its strict meaning of ‘discourse about God’” (“Theology and Mission in 2 Corinthians,” in *The Gospel to the Nations: Perspectives on Paul’s Mission*, ed. Peter Bolt and Mark Thompson [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000], 73).



their horizon.<sup>248</sup> His understanding that “our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” reveals his acknowledgment of the cosmic conflict.<sup>249</sup>

A missional hermeneutic based on such an idealistic and unreal understanding of the New Testament church as having a missionary nature, as opposed to God’s people in the Old Testament, leads to unbalanced conclusions about mission in the Old Testament.<sup>250</sup> Any model of biblical interpretation based on such unbalanced

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<sup>248</sup> “A pattern emerges in Acts according to which, when he comes to a new town, Paul initially visits the Jewish synagogue or makes contact with a Jewish group. This is true of Salamis and of Pisidian Antioch; the story of Paul’s visit there (Acts 13:13-52) is told at length so as to serve as an implicit pattern for subsequent towns. Consequently, when Paul follows the same pattern in Iconium, it can be qualified by the phrase ‘as usual’ (Acts 14:1). The pattern is expressly repeated at Philippi, at Thessalonica (where we have the comment ‘as his custom was’, Acts 17:2); Berea; Athens; Corinth and Ephesus” (I. Howard Marshall, “Luke’s Portrait of the Pauline Mission,” in Bolt and Thompson, *The Gospel to the Nations: Perspectives on Paul’s Mission*, 107). On the other hand, Robert L. Reymond recognizes that “Paul clearly felt the urgent need to root his gospel proclamation about Christ to the nations solidly in the soil of the Old Testament” (*Paul: Missionary Theologian: A Survey of His Missionary Labours and Theology* [Fearn, UK: Christian Focus Publications, 2000], 373). See also Ferdinand Hahn’s discussion about Paul’s conception of mission (*Mission in the New Testament*, 95-110).

<sup>249</sup> Eph 6:12. See also Col 2:15, Eph 3:10, 11. Peter shares this worldview (1 Pet 3:22).

<sup>250</sup> Paul W. Barnett concludes that “Jewish propaganda may have had the effect of bringing Gentiles into the community of Israel, but it was not necessarily conceived to that end. Its purpose may have been limited to commending the validity of the Jewish viewpoint, under the conviction that the Jews were in some sense the teacher of the peoples of the world in fulfillment of the vocation of Isaiah 49:6. . . . Although the zealous presentation of some apologists may have given their work a ‘proselytizing’ edge and ‘converts’ may have been won, the conversion of Gentiles may have been an unsought, perhaps even an unintended, consequence of Jewish apologetic, broadly speaking” (“Jewish Mission in the Era of the New Testament and the Apostle Paul,” in Bolt and Thompson, *The Gospel to the Nations: Perspectives on Paul’s Mission*, 270-271). He challenges the definition of mission in the New Testament: “Are we to think of such a mission as ‘aggressive,’ polemical against other religions and with missionaries sent to convert all others? Or are we to define such a mission softly, as a mere ‘missionary consciousness,’ with Jews regarding conversion to Judaism as a ‘desirable’ outcome?” (ibid., 263).

assumptions raises more questions than offering a solid framework.<sup>251</sup> The ecumenical perspective, which tries to validate a plurality of interpretations about biblical mission, misses the target. Wright is correct when he argues for a “hermeneutic of coherence,” bringing together both the New Testament authors and the Old Testament ones.<sup>252</sup>

### Summary

The assumptions and presuppositions which inform the study of mission in the Bible must come from the whole Scripture. Hermeneutics plays such an important role in every attempt to understand God and his ways of dealing with humans in the process of salvation. The text should inform hermeneutics, building up an interpretive framework which in turn should inform the reading of the text.<sup>253</sup>

God’s monotheistic character is of vital significance for the understanding of his mission. He is blessing, but also cursing, he is just but also merciful. His mission is not

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<sup>251</sup> As a result of taking the New Testament as filter for the Old, to which he adds presuppositions used by people centuries ago (i.e., Jonathan Edwards), John Piper develops a theology that does not make sense and distorts the unity of Scripture. For example, in his book *Let the Nations Be Glad!*, Piper states that Paul refers to the “times of ignorance” as to the times in which the “mystery of Christ” was kept secret (Rom 16:2; Eph 3:4-5; Col 1:26). He claims that these are the “overlooked” times referred to in Acts 14:16 or 17:30. However, the Old Testament proves that the knowledge of God was available but the messenger supposed to make God known was not. What is more striking is Piper’s conclusion: “For generations God did not intervene to purify, empower, and commission his people. . . . There was a time when the Gentiles were passed over while God dealt with Israel, and now there is a time while Israel is largely passed over as God gathers the full number of his elect from the nations” (*Let the Nations Be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003], 130, 131). The dispensationalist view transpires strongly, and he sees only hope for the nations in the Old Testament, not a real possibility for salvation (ibid., 167-174). He even claims that he bases his conclusions on God’s sovereignty. Certainly not of the God of the Old Testament!

<sup>252</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God*, 41. My main objection is the difference Wright makes between the messianic reading (up to Christ) in the Old Testament and the missional reading (from Christ on) in the New Testament, using two different hermeneutics and separating the Scriptures.

<sup>253</sup> Isa 28:10; Luke 24:27.

only to bless and save, but also to eradicate sin from the universe together with those who cling to it. Personal choice becomes a crucial part of this context.<sup>254</sup>

This chapter also showed the importance of including the whole Scripture when studying about God's missionary methods and strategies. The exclusion of any part of the Bible, especially the first chapters of Genesis, sets up the researcher for dubious if not incomplete conclusions. The great story and arch of the Scripture does not begin in Gen 12, Gen 9, Gen 6, or even Gen 3. Because of the crucial insights it contains, Gen 1 needs to constitute the starting point which will find its counterpart in Rev 22. Without Gen 1-11 we cannot understand Gen 12, or the rest of Genesis, or the Old Testament, or even the New. I strongly believe there is the key for a healthy hermeneutic of mission in the Bible. A clear understanding of sin and its effects on God's creation paves the way for a better understanding of God's solution to eradicate sin from the universe.

The cosmic conflict framework proves to be the best way of reading the Scripture missionally. It preserves the unity of Scripture, the unity and uniqueness of God's character, keeping mercy and justice, the blessing and the curses, the freedom and responsibility, the universality and particularity, as well as the centrifugal and centripetal mission in balance.

This holistic and biblically informed framework also provides answers for passages that otherwise may pose problems to the human mind. The framework takes sin seriously, treating it as more than an earthly problem. This approach includes humans in the greater picture of the universe, as well as in God's mission. Nevertheless, this chapter

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<sup>254</sup> "Mission exists because God is a missionary God who sends his people to be a blessing to all of humankind" (Samuel Escobar, *The New Global Mission: The Gospel from Everywhere to Everyone* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003], 94).

represents only an attempt to paint in wide strokes the importance and significance of the cosmic conflict framework. Any further development of the theme will be welcome.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

The cosmic conflict framework discussed in the previous chapter addresses a number of hermeneutical issues and also has some useful implications on the current form and content of mission practice.

#### **Hermeneutical Implications**

##### **The Unity and Integrality of the Bible**

The survey of the biblical understanding of mission, as well as of mission theology literature, revealed the need for a more comprehensive approach in mission studies than the ones proposed before. Most of the twentieth century witnessed a partial use of the Bible in support of particular presuppositions and understandings of mission. As John Stott and William Taylor noticed, there is a need to return to the Scripture in its entirety, as expressed in the documents at the Lausanne II in Manila and Iguassu mission conferences. One needs to study and take the Scripture seriously in order to discover the mission of God in its entirety.

Such an all-embracing study must cover the whole Bible from the first verse to the last, incorporating the diversity of missionary methods used by God. Such an approach will correct the proof-text conclusions and implications found in mission

literature today.<sup>1</sup> For example, a comprehensive reading of the Bible will reveal that God had all nations in view from the beginning. When sin entered his creation, God's mission to all nations was the natural and consistent response. Although Israel was chosen to serve, all the nations were God's continuous purpose. Jesus always referred to the nations in positive terms, even when referring to them as "gentiles."<sup>2</sup>

The cosmic conflict framework proposed in the previous chapter is not designed to eliminate or contradict previous approaches. It is a logical outcome of a comprehensive approach to the biblical text and includes other previous frameworks or centers of Old Testament—blessing, covenant, promise-fulfillment, kingdom of God, restoration, etc.

### The Presuppositions

This comprehensive biblical approach corrects several aspects noticed in mission theology works. For example, it eliminates the gaps created by dispensationalism, as well as the separation of the Testaments. The cosmic conflict framework also corrects the progression of revelation assumed by covenant theology. It expands the covenantal model from the soteriological goal, bringing it back to the original encompassing purpose—the elimination of the sin problem from the universe. In the process, it places all the other

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<sup>1</sup> William D. Taylor decries the fact that the Great Commission has lost its wholeness by omitting the practical aspects in favor of proclamation. The very aspects dealing with centripetal mission in both Testaments are missing, leading to "only a partial understanding of the mission of the church, resulting in spiritual anemia and a thin veneer of Christianity, regardless of culture or nation" (*Global Missiology for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, 4).

<sup>2</sup> Herbert Kane reminds us that the missionary "obligation" was always valid due to God's missionary nature. "It is a mistake, therefore, to think that the missionary mandate is restricted to the Great Commission. The missionary obligation of the church would be just as imperative if Jesus had not spoken those words. The missionary mandate antedates the incarnation and is rooted in the very nature of God. Indeed, if Jehovah were not a missionary God, there would have been no incarnation" (J. Herbert Kane, *The Christian World Mission: Today and Tomorrow* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1981], 17).

covenants in their right perspective. It also places God's sovereignty in the covenant in its natural context. God is going to fulfill his promises as long as humans accept his offer. The element of conditionality in the covenant is crucial for a correct understanding of God's mission. His covenants depend on the recipients' fulfillment of the conditions, while the conditions for salvation should be the same in every age.

Another aspect that gets corrected in the cosmic conflict framework is the "Christian" problem of the Old Testament which is frequently seen as inferior to the New, or even passé. The supersessionist view created by dispensationalism is eliminated for the focus is on the entire Scripture. The reader is no longer invited to believe that the Old Testament is only an introduction to or preparation for the New Testament, or even a failure on God's part. Thus, the Old Testament is restored to its rightful place as valid and authoritative, containing revelation that illuminates and impacts the understanding of mission. The cross not only unites the Testaments but is integrated into the history of redemption. The cosmic conflict framework treats both sections of the Scripture in a synthetic and integrative way.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, in his previous role as the Prefect of the Congregation for Faith and Order, warned against dividing the Scripture: "I can understand the Bible as the Word of God only if I read it in the tension engendered by seeing it as a whole, accepting everything and taking one thing with another—not merely as isolated words or phrases. It is something very real and very dramatic" (Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *God and the World* [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2002], 152). "There can be no question of setting the Old and the New Testaments against each other as two different religions; there is only one will of God for men, only one historical activity of God with and for men, though this activity employs interventions that are diverse and even in part contradictory—yet in truth they belong together. . . . Christian identity . . . is founded on the unity of the Testaments" (idem, *Many Religions, One Covenant: Israel, the Church, and the World* [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999], 57, 18).

## The Point of Departure in Mission Theology

The cosmic conflict framework assigns the main missionary role to God. All other human figures, starting with Adam, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, or David, find their right place as simply sharing in God's mission. The framework places the point of departure in theology on God. The uncertainty of where to start mission theology is thus addressed and the historical perspective finds its wholeness, as well as the intended context.<sup>4</sup>

## The Covenant and the Sacrifice

Besides correcting values, the cosmic conflict framework introduces the concept of sacrifice. A covenant based on love implies sacrifice for forgiveness and expiation of sins, but also sacrifice at a personal level. God wants us to learn that mission implies sacrifice, even the sacrifice of life as illustrated by Jesus. This is a radical teaching that permeates the Scripture but is diminished in most other mission approaches in use today.

By sharing in God's mission, humans are also invited to share in his mediatorial role. Missionaries should be able to both reflect God and invite people to join God's side, as Jesus reflected God's character and invited people to come to God in confidence, making clear on which side of the conflict he is. God's glory needs to be restored in the controversy, not humans'.

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<sup>4</sup> Kane reminds the reader that Gen 1-11 sets the agenda for the rest of the biblical history. "One does not read very far into Genesis before discovering the missionary motif. God's search for Adam after the fall (Gen 3), His expostulation with Cain regarding the murder of Abel (Gen 4), His solicitude for the safety of Noah and his family (Gen 6), His intervention at the Tower of Babel (Gen 11), His call to Abraham in Ur of the Chaldees and His purpose to bless the nations through him (Gen 12) all point to God's concern for the welfare of the human race" (Kane, *The Christian World Mission*, 26).



## The Theodicy and God's Justice

Obedience and responsibility are also emphasized in the cosmic conflict. People learn that the consequences of their actions are not diminished and evil is in no way excused or justified. Mercy does not negate justice. Righteousness implies not only God's gracious actions but also justice, which requires blood, death, and sacrifice. The traditional "blessing" approach, unfortunately, is weak on the understanding of sin and its consequences.

The solution offered should have at least the same universality and comprehensiveness as sin. Anything less will not be satisfactory in the biblical view. The problems raised by theodicy find their true answers only in theophany, in the revelation of God as part of the cosmic controversy. Such an inclusiveness should really be all-embracing, reflecting a true universality. Only God is the answer for questions about God.

## The Character of God

The Bible does not contain a missionary "idea" but a missionary God. The Trinitarian aspect of mission is present, although the roles of the divine persons are not necessarily separate. God's character is at stake in the conflict and everything revolves around restoring God's honor in the universe. The cosmic conflict framework preserves the consistency of God's character in both Testaments.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Stephen B. Bevans believes that "God is not and can never be an object! . . . God can only be subject; God is always ineffable Holy Mystery" (*An Introduction to Theology in Global Perspective* [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2009], 9). In the context of the discussion about *missio Dei*, see H. H. Rosin, "*Missio Dei*": *An Examination of the Origin, Contents, and Function of the Term in Protestant Missiological Discussion* (Leiden, Netherlands: Interuniversity for Missiological and Ecumenical Research, 1972).

The mission Christians engage in must be God's mission, and not the mission they deem appropriate. The "blessing" approach provides for a very comfortable mission, but misses the wholeness of God's character. Restoration implies cleansing, the removal of unwanted developments, and the destruction of sin and those who cling to it. This is definitely part of God's character and mission. However, God's justice is not only a manifestation of his wrath, but is also an invitation for a change of heart and a turning in life.<sup>6</sup> Human justice upholds human rights. God's justice reveals God's all-encompassing character.

Salvation is offered to everyone, and God always sends his chosen people to tell people about him. This is why the gospel has to go to the ends of the earth. Free choice requires that missionaries take the message to every nation, language, tribe, and people. Israel heard about Jesus, and all those who decided to accept him will be saved. Sin and evil were allowed to show their true colors because God's true and balanced character needed to be revealed to everyone as an answer to theodicy questions.

As a result, mission is God, the strategy is God, and the message is God.<sup>7</sup>

Everything in mission should reflect God and his character. The cosmic conflict

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<sup>6</sup> Janet Gaines recognizes that Jonah is not called simply to announce God's judgment on Nineveh but to show mercy towards the Ninevites. God's justice has a redemptive character and Jonah is called to learn from God how mission is to be done. "Yahweh summons Jonah to a very special mission, but God does not actually reveal exactly what will happen to the Ninevites. . . . What the prophet does not realize is that he receives an unambiguous, clarion call to go to Nineveh, a summons designed to shake him out of his status quo and into a new and challenging undertaking. If God's statement were merely a prediction of Nineveh's fall, Jonah could have declared it from within the safe borders of Israel" (Janet Howe Gaines, *Forgiveness in a Wounded World: Jonah's Dilemma* [Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003], 32).

<sup>7</sup> "Reconciliation in the common recognition of the kingdom of God, recognition of his will as the way, is the nucleus of Jesus' mission, in which person and message are indivisible" (Ratzinger, *Many Religions, One Covenant*, 28).

refocuses mission on its natural target in the right framework. Mission should have its origin in God in order to be true and balanced.

### Election

The concept of election is linked to conditionality in the cosmic conflict framework as well as in the prophetic messages. Israel is considered elected as long as it fulfills the role assigned by election: service. The cosmic conflict framework, however, does not leave other nations out of God's mission. They are not simply spectators but serve different purposes in God's plan. This approach eliminates the idea of election based on ethnicity. On the other hand, a correct understanding of sin shows that every nation is affected by sin and needs to be invited to choose sides in this cosmic battle. Israel was never exempt from such a choice because of its election.

### The Kingdom of God

The kingdom of God as preached by Jesus is rightly explained in the cosmic conflict framework.<sup>8</sup> God's kingdom did not start at creation or at the cross. It existed from before creation. The Israelite kingdom was supposed to be an earthly reflection of the universal kingdom of God. The earthly Sanctuary was also supposed to be an earthly reflection of God's salvation plan. Jesus' death on the cross was part of reestablishing God's kingdom on this earth, through a direct confrontation with the usurper of the

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<sup>8</sup> Taylor notes "the absence of a robust gospel of the kingdom" in mission theology today and the "use of emotive slogans to drive the mission task, leading to a false understanding of both task and success in our mission" (*Global Missiology for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, 4).

throne.<sup>9</sup> God, Israel, and the Church are all in the business of reestablishing God's kingdom.<sup>10</sup>

Both Israel and the Church receive the same call to serve, to announce God's character and his offer of salvation. Israel did not pass on its mission to the Church, although it is the same mission. Israel rejected the Church. It was God who called both Israel and the Church to join in his mission.

### Centrifugal and Centripetal Mission

In the cosmic conflict framework God did not simply call Israel for a centripetal mission, or simply to exist, while the Church was called to go in a centrifugal direction. The great controversy implies dynamic action, not passivity. The presuppositions one is reading the Bible with should come from the text. The cosmic conflict does not allow for mission to be defined as merely existing as a nation or as a church.

The cosmic conflict framework preserves the balance of God's mission orientation and method—both centrifugal and centripetal. It is worth remembering that the main world religions appeared and developed during those times when Israel and the

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<sup>9</sup> “God is seeking to bring God's kingdom, the redemptive reign of God in Christ, to bear on every dimension of life within all the world, so that the larger creation purposes of God can be fulfilled—the *missio dei*. This missional understanding has the world as its primary horizon and the church is placed at the center of the activity in relating the kingdom of God to the *missio dei*” (Craig Van Gelder, “From Corporate Church to Missional Church,” *Review and Expositor* 101 [Summer 2004]: 428).

<sup>10</sup> “Much is being written today about the missional church. We need to be careful however, that the emphasis on the kingdom oriented church does not itself become reduced to just another new programmatic response. If the focus on the *missio dei* becomes the way denominations package what they think is needed in the twenty-first century, we will be no better off. The missional church requires a DNA change” (Ronald W. Johnson, “Mission in the Kingdom Oriented Church,” *Review and Expositor* 101 [Summer 2004]: 476).

Church did not do their mission.<sup>11</sup> The cosmic conflict framework requires permanent action in both directions.<sup>12</sup>

As a result, God's way of salvation remains the same in both Testaments without limiting God to a single method, either through attraction or through going out (Heb 13:8). The New Testament presents Jesus as describing mission as a city on a hill but also as leaven in the dough or as the salt of the earth. In John 17 Jesus prays for the disciples to be in the world but not of the world. The balance between these apparently paradoxical ways of mission is a natural construct of Jesus' teaching.

### Eschatology

Although dispensationalist eschatology places the gathering of the nations only at the end of time, that belief is not correct. As was already demonstrated, the dispensational interpretation is based on extra-biblical presuppositions. The division of biblical history by arbitrarily decided periods is unnatural. The argument that the apostle Paul uses such phases needs to be understood in context. He was talking to the Jews who had an altered understanding of the Old Testament, and Paul contextualizes his message for them.

The last book of the Bible closes the story of mission with an approach already found in the Old Testament—judgment. Revelation 14:3 introduces three angels announcing God's judgment. In the Old Testament the prophets spoke frequently about

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<sup>11</sup> Speaking of Jonah's story, Ellul shows that "if the sailors do not know that drawing lots is forbidden by the God of Israel, this is because Israel has not made known to them who is in truth its God. It is because Israel has not discharged its mission" (Jacques Ellul, *The Judgment of Jonah* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971], 30).

<sup>12</sup> As Pope John Paul II has insightfully noted, "missionary activity specifically directed 'to the nations' (*ad gentes*) appears to be waning" (*Redemptoris Missio: On the Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate* [Washington, DC: US Catholic Conference, 1991], 5).

the Day of the Lord and presented it as a day of judgment. The cosmic conflict framework brings together the judgment messages of both Testaments.

It is important for mission eschatology to present a balanced and realistic view of the end, not just a triumphalistic conclusion. As the coming of the Messiah at the end of the Old Testament was expected only by a remnant, the same will be true at the end when only a remnant will wait for Christ's return. The remnant has no reason to be triumphalistic except for giving God glory for what he has done. They ask that God's judgment be implemented as a corollary to God's mission.

On the other hand, the cosmic conflict provides the answer to the questions regarding the final outcome of the controversy. God is in charge of the universe and he controls the world's affairs. He not only offers victory now, but he also guarantees that the final events will witness God's direct involvement in cleansing the universe from sin and its effects. God's mission will be accomplished.

#### A Biblical Hermeneutic vs. a Missional Hermeneutic

The cosmic conflict framework requires the scholars to go back to a theocentric approach to mission. Instead of a missional hermeneutic that prefers to focus on the social location where one needs to place himself in order to understand God's mission, a biblical hermeneutic requires one to start with God and look to him for answers regarding mission in different circumstances. A true contextualization of mission cannot be done without having a solid reference point in God.

#### **Practical Implications**

Several practical implications result from applying the cosmic conflict framework to mission. First, this biblical comprehensive hermeneutic corrects the focus of

ecumenical theology and mission by recognizing the real center of unity—God and his character—and calls ecumenists back to the primacy of the Scripture which is above political and strategic agendas.<sup>13</sup> God’s mission begins with God and remains centered on God. When God’s character is questioned, no social or political movement can substitute for mission. Liberation theology, for example, becomes valid mission only when it targets sin and allows God to decide the agenda.

Second, the framework corrects values, too. The value of material blessings included in the covenants finds its fulfillment—to be shared with others. The land, the name, and the future promised to Abraham, for example, are received to be shared, not as a reward or solely for personal use. The covenant with Abraham and the promise is no longer interpreted through contemporary values, but biblical values are allowed to inform the reading. The new framework offers a necessary correction to modern Western societies that emphasize excessive individualism and private property. When God’s glory in the cosmic conflict is the final goal, all material blessings get their proper place and value when used in his mission.

Third, the cosmic conflict framework answers a practical question that confronts scholars and missionaries alike: What is mission? Is social involvement mission? What about political or economic involvement? Should missionaries just preach, or should they simply serve people’s needs without inviting them to follow Christ? An integrative and comprehensive approach will be found in God’s all-inclusive character. All these aspects

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<sup>13</sup> “In this definitive Word of his revelation, God has made himself known to the fullest possible way. He has revealed to mankind *who he is*. This definitive self-revelation of God is the fundamental reason why the Church is missionary by her very nature” (John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 12).

could be mission if they are part of the all-encompassing goal and methods of the missionary God.

Fourth, the concept of sacrifice implied by the cosmic conflict framework challenges missionary approaches that do not require effort. Different mission strategies need to be evaluated in the light of this concept. For example, the short-term vs. long-term mission question might find an answer when analyzed in the light of the sacrifice involved. Most mission approaches in use today are influenced by the theologies behind them. The centrifugal-centripetal mission debate will find its natural answer when looked at from the sacrifice point of view. Missionary methods that do not require going out to meet people are found wanting. Such unbalanced methods create non-missionary converts and congregations. No one can claim to have a sacrificial spirit if this is not showing. On the other hand, one should not preach something one is not willing to do. In the cosmic conflict framework, to be means to do.

Fifth, when God is the originator of mission he takes upon himself the mission failures. In the cosmic conflict framework human mission failures are not always the missionaries' fault, but are due to rejection on the part of the recipients. God allows humans to decide and he respects their decisions. Missionary discouragement and burnout are lessened if the focus is on God, and not on humans.<sup>14</sup> The restricted access countries or creative access territories are not simply the fault of poor strategizing or distribution of funds. The cosmic conflict explains how an enemy wants to keep those lands outside the knowledge of a God who is just and merciful at the same time.

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<sup>14</sup> Isaiah's sending (6:8-10) reveals the responsibility of the missionary to obey God's commissioning. The focus should be on God and not on the response of the recipients since they have free choice and can choose to reject God's invitation. See also Ezek 2:3-3:11 and Matt 13.



Sixth, the cosmic conflict requires a response from people. The issue is not only accepting Christ but also turning away from sin. Responsibility for one's actions is required. The controversy involves humans created in God's image, not only their creator. The content of the missionary message becomes vital in this perspective. A profound understanding of sin and its consequences should be clearly presented to a postmodern society that no longer teaches responsibility. This has to do with the reality of judgment and with a final punishment as a consequence for rejecting God. Salvation cost Jesus' life; rejecting salvation costs life, too. The blood of Jesus is indissolubly linked to the forgiveness of sin. The cosmic conflict framework corrects previous unbalanced missionary messages such as "Once saved, always saved," or those emphasizing grace without justice.

Seventh, the cosmic conflict eschatology will restore not only the biblical interpretation of prophecy but also its practical implications. The dispensational interpretation of final events, with its attached overemphasis on the reestablishment of the Temple in Jerusalem, the existence of two people of God, and the salvation of "all Israel" finds no place in the character of God and his interpretation of final events. On the other hand, the traditional triumphant presentation of the church's mission should be balanced by the "remnant" concept that underlines the personal response to God and abandonment of sin. All other "gospels" are illegitimate.

In conclusion, by emphasizing the cosmic conflict, mission receives its rightful motivation and purpose. It correctly reflects the balance between justice and mercy in God's character and avoids the pitfall in trying to shape the biblical text according to different presuppositions a person or group might have. The cosmic conflict framework

preserves the unity of Scripture by allowing God to be the same in both Testaments. At the same time, God's mission reflects the beauty of God and his balanced character. It focuses on restoring the kingdom of God not only on earth but in the whole universe. The universal dimension of the framework respects the biblical text and places human mission within God's mission, helping humans join the true *missio Dei*—solving the problem of sin in the entire universe and reestablishing God's kingdom and dominion in the lives of those who accept to reflect God's character—*imago Dei*.

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